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["DEVEUX! ARE YOU BESIDE YOURSELF," HERBERT SINCLAIR SAID, "TO INSULT YOUR SISTER'S FRIEND?"]

DOLLY'S LEGACY.

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CHAPTER VII.

FACE to face they stood there, alone in the solitude of the grounds. There by the bank of the river, in whose waters the last Countess Desmond had found her death, stood Herbert Sinclair and our little heroine—the one with a bitter conflict raging at his heart, the other lost in a silent rapture, wondering what made the world so fair.

How could he tell her? How could he breathe the story of his own folly and disgrace into her pure ears? How sully her innocence by the knowledge of his miserable secret? How could he tell her, and how could he give her up?

"Dolly!"

The girl raised her violet eyes wistfully to his face—the strange solemnity in his voice troubled her.

"Do you trust me, sweet?"

"Better than my ownself," she murmured, "better than any one in the world!"

He still held her hand.

"I love you, Dolly," he went on, passionately; "but for a little while I dare not avow my love boldly before the world. When Lord Desmond comes home I can not go to him, and ask him to give you to me. Darling, can you be content for our happiness to be a secret just for the present?"

Dolly smiled.

"Is that all?" she whispered. "I began to fear you were going to tell me of some dreadful calamity. I would rather no one knew; it is nicer far to keep our happiness to ourselves, only"—here her voice almost broke—"I wish you were not going away!"

"I shall come back, Dolly, if not to the Castle to the village. I can take lodgings there, and haunt this spot for my picture. No one will guess that art is no longer my attraction, and that I have found something nearer and dearer."

A distant clock was chiming. The sound smote terror into Dolly's heart.

"I must go."

"I cannot spare you yet."

"I must, indeed. I shall be wanted."

"By whom so much as me, I wonder?"

"Mab will be impatient."

"I wish I could take you away," he cried, passionately—"I wish I could make you my own at once."

But he was obliged to own it was getting late. With many a fond adieu, many a warm caress, he went with her to the end of the shrubbery; then they parted.

Herbert had an instinctive desire to shield his darling from even the breath of scandal, and he would not be walking at her side so late in any spot overlooked by the windows of the Castle.

Dolly sped on quickly, the crimson shawl wrapped round her uncovered head framed but did not hide her sweet, wistful face. Never had she looked lovelier than at this moment, the bright light of happiness in her eyes, a faint pink flush on her cheeks!

She sped on quickly, looking neither to the right nor left, intent only on regaining the house, when, just as she stood by the entrance to the west wing, a hand was laid upon her arm.

"Not so fast, Red Riding Hood. What is

all this haste about? You are much too pretty to run away like this."

The first sound of the voice told her the danger she had so feared when she heard of Lord Devereux's coming had actually arrived. It was the Viscount's hand that held her in a grim, vice-like clasp—it was his handsome, evil face so near her own.

She gave a little cry of alarm.

"Be quiet," reproved Devereux. "How you tremble! Why, as he drew her into the hall beneath the light of a large lamp—"will wonders ever cease?—it's my *rara avis* of Regent-street, my proud songstress of Kensington!"

"For pity sake, let me go!"

"I am far too pleased to renew our acquaintance. I must say I am surprised to find you here. I gather things have looked up with you since New Year's night or I should not see you in my father's house, or"—and he smiled wickedly—"did you regret your cruelty to your humble servant, and come here in search of me?"

"I never knew you lived here."

"You haven't answered my question."

"Which one?"

"What are you doing here?"

"I am Lady Mabel's companion."

"Who sent you here?"

"Mrs. Pemberton."

Devereux whistled.

"I think it's the first good turn that lady ever did me. Of course, you'll spare me a little of your charming society, Miss Smith?"

"I shall do no such thing."

"You'll have to."

"Are you a man?" cried Dolly, *staring past endurance by his manner.* "Aren't you ashamed to persecute a poor hapless girl. You may be an evil's son, but your conduct is a disgrace to your rank."

"Your temper does not match your face," said Devereux, *agreeably.* "If you were not such a little beauty I might wash my hands of such a spiteful; but I always admired a pretty woman, and so I put up with your airs and graces."

Once again she struggled in his grasp; then she raised her voice almost unconsciously in her anguish.

"Oh, let me go!" she cried, "let me go!"

Herbert Sinclair heard that cry as he was crossing the hall; another moment and he was at Dolly's side.

"Devereux, are you hurting yourself?" he said, sharply, "to insult your sister's friend?"

"We don't want your interference, Sinclair," said the Viscount. "I assure you this young lady is an old acquaintance of mine."

"Then you had better choose another time for your interview. It is getting late, and Miss Smith is evidently alarmed."

Reluctantly enough Lord Devereux released Dolly's hand, hissing this farewell into her ears,—

"Remember, we meet again!"

The terrified girl made no answer. She tore away as fast as her feet would carry her, and never stopped until she found herself in Mabel's bedroom, kneeling by the child's little white bed.

"What is it?" asked Mab, sleepily. "Dolly, where have you been? I have wanted you so!"

"In the grounds," confessed Miss Smith.

"In the grounds!" repeated the child, wonderingly, "at this time? Why, it is past ten o'clock!"

Poor Dolly! She could read bewilderment and suspense in Mab's very voice, but she could not speak in her own defence. She was too faint and heart-sick.

Herbert Sinclair loved her. The thought was happiness, but, alas! Lord Devereux had discovered her. She could expect nothing but misery at his hands. He would tell her lover how he had seen her last, singing for money in the public streets. Would even Herbert's tenderness survive such a disclosure?

She need not have feared. When she awoke a little note was on her dressing-table—only a line, but it allayed her terror.

"Sweetheart, will you meet me at our first trysting-place before breakfast? I have much to tell you."

She was early at the spot, but, early as she was, she found him there. Herbert opened his arms and gathered her to himself.

"My darling!" *breathed* "Has he told you?" she breathed.

"Told me what, Dolly?" as he gathered her meaning. "Do you think I would listen to Lord Devereux, or allow him to take your name upon his lips?"

"I meant to tell you myself," she whispered, "only last night I was so happy!"

"So happy!" Herbert Sinclair trembled as he heard the words. He knew he had behaved like a villain the night before, and yet he had made this sweet, trustful girl "so happy!"

"Tell me what you will," he said, fondly; "only remember, Dolly, it makes no difference. Nothing can change the one fact—I love you!"

She told him her story; she kept back nothing; how she had been a dressmaker's assistant; how she had sung for alms; and how through all John Devereux had been a black shadow on her path.

"He is a bad man," she said, simply. "He says he loves me, but Herbert, he cannot; he is engaged to a beautiful young lady."

"And you think, child, a man may not love one woman and be bound to another?" said Herbert, feverishly.

"Don't talk like that; it is almost as though you believed Lord Devereux."

"I don't believe him, Dolly; and be very sure of one thing—I will never yield you to him. He would bring you nothing but misery."

He *swore* as he spoke. He did not mean to yield his darling to the Viscount. He meant to keep her for his own; and yet, as he had said to her of Devereux, and even might say to her of himself, "he could bring you nothing but misery."

"Do you think—" she stopped abruptly.

"Do I think what, child? Surely you are not afraid of me, Dolly?"

"Do you think Lord Devereux will persuade his mother to send me away?"

"I think not. But if she did?"

Dolly's eyes filled with tears.

"I should have no home—I should be a lonely little wanderer from everything good and pleasant."

"You would come to me," he said, *passionately.* "Dolly, if you left Field Royal it would only be to share my life. Don't fret yourself with anticipating trouble, darling. Can't you trust me to make you happy?"

She did trust him. She went home with a strange gladness shining in her eye—not even the sight of Lord Devereux sitting at breakfast with Mab shook her trust.

"Devereux has come to see us," said Mab, joyously. "He says he had no idea we were here; and, Dolly, he has been singing to me himself."

Dolly felt as if Mab had gone over to the enemy, and yet she could not blame the child. Lady Mabel had one of those confiding natures which respond to kindness as the flowers do to sunshine. Half-an-hour's careless good nature from Viscount Devereux had made her forget all his previous slights.

He showed to greater advantage now than Dolly had ever seen him. He lingered another hour in the schoolroom, and he exerted himself to be agreeable. In spite of all his faults there was a certain fascination in his gay, bright manner and careless wooing tones. He was a man who rarely troubled himself to please, and yet when he did so succeeded far better than many worthier men.

There was nothing in his behaviour Dolly could resent, nothing she could possibly allege to Mab against him. If his eyes never left her face and he held her hand longer than was necessary when he bade her good-morning,

this was hardly an offence she could explain to a child.

"The Castle will be free in a few days," said Lord Devereux, carelessly. "The men I have staying with me are due in London next week, then I shall have more time for you, Mab. I think you are the best of my sisters, child, though you haven't been educated at a fashionable boarding school."

Mab felt intensely flattered. She seemed to have taken suddenly a great fancy to her brother, and she was a little hurt that Dolly would not share it.

"You forget, my lady," said Mrs. Bond, coming to the rescue when she saw her favourite hard pressed. "Miss Smith has only seen Lord Devereux once. He is not her brother, as he is yours."

Mab looked relieved.

"I thought Dolly might remember all I said against him," she remarked, gravely. "I am sure he is very nice now."

"She'll be a child all her days," said the old housekeeper, when she was alone with Dolly. "The Viscount's just what he used to be, only from some cause or other he's chosen to show her a little tenderness. I can't make out what he hopes to gain by it, but he's not a man to do anything from good nature. Now, Mr. Sinclair is quite a different gentleman."

Dolly blushed hotly, and wished her lover's name had not such a power to move her colour.

"Mr. Sinclair," *went on* the garrulous old woman, "would never raise a hope he didn't mean to gratify. They say he means to marry one of our young ladies. I doubt if it's true myself, but if the deed she'll be a happy woman."

"Whose felicity are you predicting?"

The question came from Herbert himself. He had entered unperceived in time to hear her last words.

Mrs. Bond was in no way taken aback.

"Your lady, Mr. Sinclair. I was just telling Miss Smith your wife would be a happy woman."

Dolly *repeated* him to make some light, laughing remark; but to her surprise he looked grave and stern.

He made no answer to the old housekeeper. He waited till she had gone, then he took Dolly's hands into his.

"I have come to say good-bye."

"Good-bye!"

"Yes, my darling; I leave Field Royal in an hour."

"But I thought you were going to stay till next week? I am sure you said so."

"And I believed it. Dolly, I have just had a furious quarrel with Devereux, and I cannot break bread in his house again."

She was silent and trembling.

Very tenderly Herbert put her in a chair, and stood bending over her.

"I can't help thinking he wanted to pick a quarrel with me. He began on every subject he knew would be distasteful to me, and at last he used words I could not pass over."

Dolly nestled a little closer to his side.

"You won't fight a duel?" she said, appealingly. "Oh! Herbert, do promise me!"

"I promise you," he answered. "But, Dolly, Devereux and I can never meet as friends again."

"And you are going?"

"I have no choice. It breaks my heart to leave you, but after all it may be the best means of helping forward our future. I must find a home for my treasure and prepare it for her. I can do that better in London than at Field Royal."

"And you are quite sure?"

"Of what?"

"That you want me."

"Yes," he said, very gravely. "So sure that I would run any risks to win you. And you, Dolly, are you sure too? Sure that my love can make you happy?"

"I want naught else."

"It is all I can give you," he said, with a strange yearning regret that was almost a sob.

"I would make you a princess if I could. I would crown you a queen, and yet Dolly, I am powerless. I cannot offer you a title or a coronet. I can give you only love."

"And love is best of all."

"May you ever think so."

"I know I shall. I can't explain it, Herbert, only I seem to feel I am not one to change."

Then he told her of his plans. He was going to London to make some needful preparations. So soon as Viscount Devereux should have left Field Royal he would return to Northshire and put up at the village inn. Then he would take Dolly away with him, and they would begin their new bright life together.

"Only you must tell no one," he enjoined; "it is our secret, remember, Dolly—yours and mine."

"But when I am going away," pleaded Dolly, a little hesitant, "surely I may tell Mab then?"

"No."

"But to say good-bye to her?"

"You can write to her afterwards."

"She will be so hurt."

"It is the only plan, Dolly. No one must ever know our secret until the sea is between us and England."

Dolly trembled.

"Could they part us?"

"I think so."

Oh! the pent-up sadness of his voice! Oh! the deep regret in his dark eyes.

"It is not my fault, Dolly," he cried, passionately. "I cannot help myself. If I had my own way I would marry you before all the world. You should have six bridesmaids, and the noblest names in England should do honour to my bride, but I can't help myself. I am bound hand and foot by a chain I am powerless to break."

"Do you mean you are in debt?"

He smiled sadly.

"Heavily in debt," thinking of the promises he had made before he ever saw her face.

"I must try and be so expensive," she whispered. "Oh! Herbert, I will do my best to help you."

"I know you will. Only child, you understand why your wedding must be a secret one, why you must tell no one in the world you are my bride."

And thinking of his debts and poverty, which she believed in, she answered, "I understand."

"And now good-bye. Ah, Dolly, when I came to Field Royal how little I thought what I should find there. Child, I think it must have been love at first sight. Oh, little girl, Heaven pardon me if I am bringing sorrow upon your golden head!"

"I can bear anything with you," she whispered.

Another moment and he was gone. The schoolroom looked duller and more dreary to Dolly than it had ever done before, as she threw herself wearily into a chair and flattened her small face against the window, resolved not to leave her post until she had seen the last of her hero.

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER that morning things went sadly for Dolly. Before the advent of Herbert Sinclair she had not been unhappy at Field Royal. Quiet and monotonous as the life was it suited her. The peaceful home, the exemption from all pecuniary cares, had been precious to her; and she had borne with all Lady Mabel's whims with exemplary patience because she felt the child loved her. But from the moment Viscount Devereux set foot in the west wing Mab changed. She had one of those jealous, sensitive natures that can rarely care for two people at once. She had cared for Dolly passionately until it dawned upon the jealous little brain that Miss Smith and Mr. Sinclair cared more for each other than for her. She was moping over this idea when her brother appeared, and, instead of slighting her as he had been accustomed to do, seemed disposed

to make much of her. Poor Mab straightway transferred her devotion to him, and became cold and querulous in her manner to Dolly.

Ivor Vernon and Mr. Dugdale speedily followed Herbert Sinclair, the Viscount, to everyone's surprise, remained behind and devoted himself to his little sister and her friend.

He seemed to have changed his tactics; he never said a word to Dolly that she could take umbrage at, and yet his whole manner annoyed her. A dozen times a day she wished he would leave Field Royal—a dozen times a day she wondered what was the reason of his quarrel with her lover.

She was to be enlightened on the last point soon. Mab was drawing one afternoon when she suddenly regretted her friend's absence.

"If only Mr. Sinclair was here he would show me how to do this tree. Jack, will he come back soon?"

"Herbert Sinclair will never come back here, Mab," said the Viscount, shortly.

"Never? But I thought he was such a friend of mamma's? and you know, Jack, he is very nice."

"I don't think so."

"Why do you speak so angry?"

"You wouldn't understand, child! Sinclair a dishonourable scoundrel."

"You would not dare to call him such to his face," came in a girl's clear, defiant tones. "I wonder you are not ashamed to defame the absent."

Of course Dolly was the speaker, her violet eyes flashing with passionate indignation. She looked at Lord Devereux scornfully; it was the first time she had voluntarily addressed to him any but the shortest and most necessary remarks.

"Wrong for once, Miss Smith," said the Viscount, coolly. "I addressed the very words which have so displeased you to Mr. Sinclair."

Dolly's face paled.

"You did not dare."

"I did; I have no cause to fear him. There is no ugly secret in my life."

"And you would dare to hint there is such a secret in his?"

"I would take my oath of it."

Mab looked up puzzled.

"Has he done anything wrong?"

"Nothing you would understand, child. Miss Smith, don't you think a man dishonourable who woos a woman he can never make his wife?"

Dolly's eyes flashed.

"I thought it was a favourite pastime of yours," she said, coolly.

He crossed over to her side; Mab in the window with her sketching was as much removed from them as though she had been in another room.

"And you can say that to me—you for whose sake I broke off my engagement to the Lady Madeline Charteris?"

"If your engagement is broken off, I, at least, had nothing to do with it," she said, simply.

"I did it only for your sake; you would not listen to me. I wanted to show you I was free."

A silence long and deep. Dolly sat with one hand shading her face; she did not believe one word of Lord Devereux's protestations of his own devotion; she scorned his accusations of her lover. And yet she yearned with passionate longing for the sight of Herbert's face, the sound of his voice.

Lord Devereux thought her overwhelmed by his generosity, and decided he had turned the note in his pocket, by which Madeline terminated their engagement, to a very good account indeed.

"She'll come to her senses in a few months," he thought to himself, "and meanwhile I can spend my time very pleasantly in caging this little wild bird. It's nonsense to think she cares for Sinclair, as if I could not cut him out. Having a rival gives just the spin of excitement to the affair it wanted."

"I am free," said the Viscount, in low, thrilling tones; "for your sake I have broken

my troth to one of the proudest heiresses in England. I am free, and I only ask a smile from you."

"You ask too much."

"Think what I can offer you," he went on, petulantly; "from a poorly-paid dependant I can make you a peeress—the future mistress of Field Royal!"

"I wish for no such honours."

"Perhaps you think Sinclair will come back to you. Bah! You don't know what fickle fellows artists are; every pretty face takes their fancy."

"Possibly."

"Are you mad enough to think yourself engaged to Sinclair?"

She dared not answer "yes." For the first time her lover's injunction to secrecy weighed hard on her. Her eyes drooped beneath the Viscount's gaze, but she said nothing.

"You see," said Devereux, triumphantly, "you cannot answer me! He was only amusing himself; why should you wear the willow for him?" "Do you know you are in my power?" went on Lord Devereux, mockingly. "A word from me can send you a homeless wanderer into the streets."

"Then speak it!" cried Dolly, defiantly; "Field Royal is not such a pleasant home to me I should regret leaving it!"

"My mother returns next week," went on the Viscount; "she is a woman of strong prejudices, most particular as to the proprieties of life; I think she would shudder in her bed if she knew a street singer was her daughter's friend and companion."

"You can tell her."

"I shall not do so unless you drive me to it. I have too much regard for that golden head to bring down such a storm upon it! Only be reasonable, and—"

They were interrupted. Mab turned round from the window with a startled cry.

"There is a carriage coming up the avenue loaded with luggage, and—yes, really! I can see a fly behind it! Oh, Devereux! what does it mean? Has mamma come home?"

"Probably," said the Viscount. "She never does things like other people. I'll go and see." Then as he passed Dolly's chair he whispered, "You must make your choice which I am to be—friend or foe! I warn you, you will find my mother a hard woman when she is displeased."

From the bottom of her heart Dolly regretted the return of Mabel's parents. Painful as her position had been the last week Lord and Lady Desmond's presence at Field Royal would add to her perplexities. Now it was easy for her to receive her lover's letters and post her own replies; how would it be with the Countess at home? Besides, when the most important letter of all came, when she received the tidings that her lover had returned and was waiting for her at the village inn, how should she steal away to meet him, with an overseer so sharp and exacting as was, from all accounts, Matilda Lady Desmond?

But the introduction to her employers was delayed longer than she had anticipated.

After four months' absence the Countess had a great deal to arrange and inspect; besides, her elder girls were at home, and once or two eligible men had been "picked" up on the Continent and brought to Northshire, so that, beyond a hasty visit to Mab in her own room, Lady Desmond really had very little time to trouble herself about the affairs of her youngest child.

The schoolroom was left very much to itself save for the Viscount's visits.

Dolly was coming to the conclusion she need not have so lamented the family's return, when one morning brought her a letter from her lover, banishing every other thought.

Herbert wrote tenderly; there was nothing in that. His letters always breathed the most devoted affection, but generally there was about them a strain of sadness, an underlying tone of melancholy, which told that the truth of which he had hinted to his fiancée

was a very real one, and no mere creature of a fevered imagination.

But there was no sadness, no melancholy, about this latest letter; its every line breathed exultation. He assured Dolly the clouds had rolled back from their pathway, and that their future would be as bright and untroubled as an Italian sky; and then he wound up by assuring her again and again of his love for her, and promising that three days after the receipt of this letter she would find him once more in their old trysting-place by the silvery waters of the river Way.

It was an ideal love-letter, tenderness and fidelity breathed in every line.

It was very precious to Dolly, and yet it did not make her happy.

When Herbert had been fearful and downcast about their future, his alarm had never touched her; when he held her in his arms and asked her if she could be content with love, and love only, she had felt no fear, but now the shadow of his uneasiness fell upon her. Even as she read his words of joyous fondness, his exulting prophecy that very soon they would be together, to part no more, she shuddered; at the very moment when her lover told her their happiness was certain, she trembled; when she ought to have been confident she was alarmed.

She never doubted Herbert's love, never from the instant their lips met for the first time did she doubt that she knew her whole heart was his, and yet, such is the strength of a nervous presentiment, in the very moment her happiness seemed near fruition an awful certainty came to her that the cup of joy would never reach her lips, that not for her was the precious title of Herbert Sinclair's wife.

Lord Devereux's taunts came back to her. She remembered how he had sworn Herbert was not free. She never believed the slander—never for an instant—and yet she seemed to know, by a marvellous instinct, that she and her lover would never be nearer to each other than they were now—that though they might stand together at God's altar they would yet never be true man and wife. Some avenging fall would strike one of them with sudden death, or some other calamity would part them.

"Dolly," said Mab's voice, plaintively, for about the third time, "Dolly, why won't you speak to me?"

By an effort Dolly collected her thoughts. She crushed her letter in her pocket, and strove to come back to the things of everyday life.

"Were you saying anything, Mab?"

"I was telling you of Mr. Sinclair's good fortune. Mrs. Bond told me last night when I was in bed. Don't you care to hear it?"

"Very much."

She supposed it to be the cause of the elation of his letter, little recking that it was owing to no worldly honours present or to come.

"Some old great uncle whom he has never seen has died suddenly," said Mab, "and now Mr. Sinclair's father is a duke. He will be a duke himself if he lives long enough."

Dolly smiled.

"He couldn't be nicer than he is," she said, with just a touch of fond appropriation in her voice, "and Sinclair is a very pretty name."

"It isn't his name any longer; at least no one will call him by it. His father is Duke of Portsea, and he is Lord Asherton!"

"Really?"

"Really. There is some other title in the family that Mr. Sinclair's father used to have, but they will drop that now. Mamma is delighted he is Lord Asherton. She always wanted him to marry one of my sisters, and now his wife will be a duchess some day."

"His wife will be a duchess some day!" The words seemed burnt into Dolly's brain. And she was to be his wife—she who had sung for money in the public streets! Would he love her less now he was so rich and great? Ah, no; she had his own letter. What ever happened she could not, would not, doubt him. He was her lover faithful and true, despite the new dignity devolving on him. He was coming back to

her, and yet that awful presentiment would not leave her. A mocking voice seemed crying in her ears that not for her was this happiness—not for her was the title of Lady Asherton.

Lord Devereux took occasion to join her that morning, and his first words were,—

"So Sinclair's to be a duke! I suppose you never expect to see him again, Miss Smith?"

Dolly's eyes flashed.

"The world is so small one meets most people twice," she observed, calmly.

"I asked you a question the other night?"

"I know you did," blushing. "You have asked me a great many questions, Lord Devereux."

"But this particular one needs an answer. Which am I to be to you, friend or foe?"

"Neither."

"Your pardon, I must be one."

"I don't see it."

"Listen," and for once all affectation died out of his voice, and it was earnest, passionate. "I don't know what spell there is about you. I have seen handsome women, I have met the most accomplished beauties of the day, but not one of them touched my heart as you do. From the moment I saw your face I have never been able to forget it; waking and sleeping your image haunts me. I never believed in love, save as a pastime; but since I have seen you I have ceased to scoff at the passion, for I know that love exists, and I love you."

"I wish you did not."

It was the first time she had ever seemed to acknowledge the reality of his affection. He looked at her with a strange, passionate longing in his face.

"I am not a good man. Some people say I have the makings of a bad one; but, Dolly, I love you."

"I wish you did not."

"You said that before."

"What else can I say?"

"You can bid me hope."

"I cannot."

"Do you mean that nothing will ever persuade you to listen to me?"

"I mean just that."

"You don't understand," said Lord Devereux, thinking she could not have taken in the rashness of the sacrifice he meditated. "You have such a hold on me that I could forget ambition, family pride, and interest for your sake. I am not asking you to be the idle plaything of an hour, but my wife, the future Countess of Devereux."

He imagined he had made a very generous offer, and he never doubted what her answer would be.

"I can only answer as I said before, Lord Devereux. I can not listen to you."

"You are afraid of my parents?"

"I am afraid of nothing."

"You think they would be hard upon you, but you might trust me to protect you against every unkind word."

Dolly shook her head.

"I wish you would understand me, Lord Devereux. My reason is a very simple one, and given in five words—I do not love you!"

"But in three—"

"No time would alter my feelings. Do you know you are indirectly the cause of my mother's death, that in her anxiety to remove me from your persecution she exposed herself to the illness that killed her?"

"I am very sorry."

"I am not reproaching you; I only want you to see how impossible it is that you and I could ever be aught to each other."

"I expect you would never have found out the impossibility if you had not met Mr. Sinclair—Lord Asherton, I should say. You aim high, then, Miss Smith. A future earl is not deserving of your notice; you can smile at nothing under an embryo duke."

"I can smile on no man I do not trust."

"And you trust him?"

"I trusted him from the moment I saw him. He has never given me cause to do otherwise."

Devereux whistled.

"You'll regret it to your dying day."

"I think not."

"I tell you you will. Herbert won't marry you; he can not."

"I never said he thought of love or marriage. You asked me if I trusted him; I told you yes."

"And you refuse me?"

"Decidedly."

"Well, you'll live to regret it. I was a fool to think of making a peeress of a street singer. You'll remember one day, when your pride has had a fall, all you have thrown away; but it'll be too late to repent then when you're singing in the streets again. It won't be a pleasant thought that you refused to be a countess. I suppose I ought to thank you for saving me from my folly, but when a woman has got a face like yours, somehow a man doesn't seem to care much what folly he commits for it."

He left her as suddenly as he had come, and poor Dolly sank into a chair, white and trembling.

The interview had been a very trying one to her in many ways. She rejected John Devereux's insinuations against her lover with the scorn they deserved, and yet how wonderfully they accorded with the presentiment of evil which oppressed her.

"Oh! my darling," thought the poor girl, in her anguish, "if only I could see you, if I could tell what you are doing now, I think it would be easier to bear. Are you happy? Does this awful presentiment of sorrow trouble you too?"

No, it did not trouble him; the new Lord Asherton was perfectly happy. The shadow that had weighed on his brow was lifted; he looked years younger. He could think of his darling now without a heartache, without a pang of remorse. Her sweet, girlish love would owe no sorrow to him now; never now need he dread her hearing the secret of his life; and the magician that had worked the change was not his new title; his honours, present and to come, his vast wealth, had nothing to do with the smile on Herbert's lips. What had worked the marvel? Only a small slip of paper which had reached him the day before. Not a letter, just a formal certificate, duly filled in and authenticated by the name of a well-known medical man.

Don't blame my hero, don't shudder at his heartlessness when I tell you that paper was a certificate of death, that it recorded the decease of one Magdalen Sinclair, at the early age of twenty-five, of consumption.

Magdalen had been his boyhood's love. Time was when he had deemed the world well lost for her. She had wrecked his home, blighted his life, and now her death seemed to remove the last shadow from his path, since it left him free to give his name to the girl whom he loved deeply, passionately, fervently, as, alas! he had never loved Magdalen.

(To be continued.)

DIAMONDS.

An article has been going the rounds of the press, copied from a French paper, showing the power of diamonds to absorb and retain light. According to this article, it appears that a gentleman having a large diamond subjected it to the sun's rays for an hour, and afterwards removed it to a dark room, where it emitted sufficient light to render a piece of white paper visible.

The tradition of this power of the diamond is very old, and has been worked into romance by Bulwer.

This article reminds me of an experiment to which (says an American writer) I was an eye-witness, some twenty-five years ago.

Captain Samuel Dewey, formerly well known as the man who decapitated the figure of General Jackson on the frigate *Constitution*, while lying in Boston harbour, called upon me one day, and, alluding to the tradition,

said he had in his possession a very large diamond, and would like to try the experiment.

The city had a short time before introduced the fire alarm telegraph, and we obtained permission to use their battery to obtain the desired light, which was done by placing the ends of two wires near together and running a continued stream of electricity from one to the other.

Accordingly one evening we repaired to the office of the telegraph company, and after exposing the diamond to this intense electric light for fifteen minutes, the current was cut off and the room left perfectly dark, but the diamond had become quite luminous and emitted light for some ten or fifteen minutes, when it gradually faded from sight.

I have never been able to obtain any satisfactory explanation to this phenomenon, but should be very glad to hear a scientific reason for it.

THE MOOSE NEARLY EXTINCT.

THE time is close at hand when the moose will become extinct.

Pursued at all seasons of the year by roving Indians and hunter traps, to say nothing of the common ruck of sportsmen, bulls, cows with young, and half-grown calves are killed indiscriminately at all seasons.

These creatures are the largest of the deer family, measuring, when full grown, 5ft. 8in. to 6ft. in height, and weighing 1,200lb. or more. They have a coarse, erect mane, while under the throat dangles a long tuft of hair.

Animals indigenous to these high latitudes usually assume a white fur during the winter months; that on the moose, on the contrary, becomes much darker in colour.

Their antlers are foliated, and of immense weight and size, averaging 6ft. from tip to toe, and weighing upwards of 60lb. These they shed in January. By the month of June they have again attained their normal size.

Their forelegs are so disproportionate in length as to seriously interfere with their grazing; consequently, when feeding upon grass, they will, if possible, pasture upon a slope.

Their hind feet are splayed, and furnished with long, loose, horny points, which rattle as they shamble along.

Notwithstanding their awkwardness and great size, when alarmed they travel with astonishing speed, seemingly impossible in an animal crowned with such immense and weighty antlers.

His head-gear, however, gives him, when in flight, less trouble than his legs. The head, carried so high as to prevent him from seeing the ground directly in his front, causes him to trip and stumble over the fallen trunks and branches which may lie in his path.

The cow-moose is somewhat smaller than the male; her coat has a more reddish tinge. Early in life she gives birth to but one calf; as she advances in years the number is increased to two.

JOURNALISM IN THE EAST.—The *Indian Mirror* tells of some strange and amusing curiosities of journalism which the native press of that country furnishes. Some time ago a native paper of Ahmedabad published one of its issues on yellow paper. Its readers were at a loss to account for the transformation when a week afterwards it came out on dark green paper, with an editorial note explaining the reason, which was that their stock of ordinary white paper had been exhausted. Consequently the proprietor was obliged to use some coloured paper which was intended for wrappers. Another native journal in Guzerat disappeared from the scene for two consecutive weeks. On the third week it appeared with an apologetic note, stating that readers were not served in consequence of the editor's sister being ill. A third was in a similar way temporarily eclipsed. In this case the editor had to proceed to Bombay as a witness in a small court case.

A LUCKY FAILURE.

—O—

"You'll be sure to come?" Mrs. Compton asked, anxiously.

"It's a bore, you know," with an air of weariness that was not an affectation.

"If I didn't know you, Cecil, I should be utterly disgusted. Half the men I know are wild for the chance I offer you."

"And the other half?"

"Will be here. You will find a little crowd."

"Another time will not do? Next week? I haven't got over my holidays yet. You don't want Miss Maythorne to carry away an impression of a man in the last agonies of sea-sickness?"

"It isn't likely she will carry away any impressions whatever. She sees too many people to note any unremarkable one especially. It is to give you a chance to see her, and not she you."

"Tell me about her," suddenly interested, or seeming to be.

Mrs. Compton laid down her strip of crewl work. She was small and bright and energetic, and she never could do but one thing at a time. With Miss Maythorne in the question conventional daisies and lilies must give way.

"She was born and reared in Stockholm. Her mother was a Spaniard, her father a Swede. She hasn't a bit of education, as education goes nowadays."

"Dubious English?"

"Very delicious English. Quite correct, but with little foreign touches of accent to make it piquant."

"Can she sing?"

"No," with volumes of wonder in her voice and face. "She has a nice voice, but not a bit of training. I don't believe she has studied a year."

"And she comes before a London audience and sings in Patti's roles?"

"She doesn't know that she can't sing. She means to, you know. She has the highest possible ideal. And the puzzle of it is the public have accepted her."

"What for?"

"For her beauty and her unconsciousness of it, and her wonderful magnetism. She thinks it is her singing, you know."

"But I don't see how she managed to get a foothold."

"Her uncle had personal interest with somebody who had more, and between them they made the girl believe in her genius. Then they put her before the public in some spectacular thing, and she took at once."

"No, thank you," shrugging his shoulders and rising. "You'll have to excuse me this time, Fanny."

"She is as much the fashion off the stage as on. You'll be sorry some day."

"I sha'n't come to you for pity. New I must go."

"Do as you please," turning a shapely shoulder towards him; and Cecil Meredith, painter and enthusiast under a thin varnish of cynicism, went out laughing.

After all, he bought a ticket for *Faust* that night. Miss Maythorne—that was her stage name—was Marguerite. The stage setting was ordinary enough, with the wear and tear of other seasons. Apparently the manager was not so sure of the card he had played that he cared to risk much money on accessories. Marguerite came on, sang the brief, lovely strain that marks her entrance, passed across the stage and vanished. The audience greeted her enthusiastically, and Cecil Meredith took his hat and rose to go.

"No; hold on," some one said behind him.

"Wait a little. You want to see her."

"She can't sing."

"She can act. Watch the audience. That's as good as the play."

So Meredith, to whom, after all, his eyes gave the chief part of all that made life worth

living, sat down again. He had an impression of a tall, splendidly-poised figure, with a majestic simplicity of motion. He was willing to wait on the chance of a hint towards those secrets of colour and form toward which he was always struggling.

The evening went on; the jewel scene—the garden scene—the scene in the chapel—and Meredith saw through them all. It was as Hawley had said—the behaviour of the audience was more entertaining than the stage. The house seemed to have lost all its sober judgment. Her appearance called out round after round of applause; her disappearance was the signal for frantic recalls.

Miss Maythorne's voice was by no means commonplace. It had tones in it that thrilled him with a curious depth of emotion, but it was utterly crude. Her acting was crude, too, wholly unconventional, and her few mannerisms were of the worst. But there was real power in that, and Meredith found himself trying to explain the enthusiasm of the house on that ground. And yet that a woman dared to appear before such an audience with such predecessors was something so audacious, so beyond all calculation, that he had to look deeper.

Beautiful she certainly was; the unconscious queenliness of her pose as she stood before the curtain when the last scene was over, a roar of applause filling the air, under her feet a mass of costly exotics, was something beyond all his experience. He found himself leaning forward, not applauding certainly, but studying her breathlessly.

"Come!" Hawley said, again. The crowd was beginning to stir and stream out. "Don't you want to speak to her?"

"To speak to her!"

"Don't be so amazed. My sister is great friends with her, and Clara is sure to go behind the curtain. She never loses a chance."

Mrs. Saville was just leaving her box, and good-naturedly enough included Meredith in the little group accompanying her. They stumbled through a dark passage, somehow found the fastenings of a rough, temporary door, and swinging it open stood on the stage.

The scenery was being rapidly cleared away. Half the lights had been extinguished; there was a confusion of voices and dark figures in the black caverns beyond and behind. But in the centre of the great open space there was a little crowd, and among them, conspicuous by her height, stood Eleanor Maythorne.

She wore the dress of the last scene, but over it she had thrown a furred mantle, and stood so, listening quietly to the eager iteration of compliments and praises showered upon her. Fair she was of herself without any stage appliances; the clear shell-pink of her complexion, the amber ripples of heavy, low-growing hair, the wide, eager, sea-blue eyes, betraying her Northern blood.

"A daughter of the gods! Look at her face! I believe she hears Thor thundering through all that stuff that Myers is talking." Meredith had time for a little aside to Mrs. Saville, as they stood on the outskirts of the group.

Mrs. Saville smiled indulgently. There was not much in the way of extravagant praises she had not heard in the last month. And then the beauty saw her, and put an abrupt period to Myers's extravaganzas by coming towards her a step or two with outstretched hands.

Then there was a little ceremony of introduction, and Meredith bowed low.

"Mr. Meredith," Miss Maythorne repeated; "Cecil Meredith," as if going back into her memory. "You paint pictures?" tentatively.

"I paint pictures—yes. Your memory must be extraordinary, Miss Maythorne."

"My memory is good—yes. But I see a great many people, and I am forced to ask sometimes. It is awkward to be mistaken." She said it quite simply and calmly, but a little wearily, too.

"It is time you were at home," Mrs. Saville

said, rapidly, in an undertone. "It is past midnight. Send those people away."

She turned obediently, as if she were used to being managed.

"I must go," she said, in her frank, direct way. "You have all been very kind, but—I am very tired;" and with a little sweeping courtesy, perfectly stately and yet perfectly unaffected, she bowed herself away and vanished by a wing.

Meredith looked at Mrs. Saville with a smile of amusement.

"One can't accuse her of society manners, at least. How is that sort of thing relished?"

"That sort of thing is voted just the thing. Did you ever see less of the etiquette in any human being?"

"As my experience in this case is about a minute and a half long, I can safely say I never did."

He went home in an odd excitement. The wonderful moulding of head and shoulders and arms, the intensity of colouring that made all the other blondes he had known look washed-out and feeble, were like a revelation to him. Whether she could sing or not, her voice in conversation was, as his cousin had said of her English, "delicious." He could not get her out of his head.

"It will seem different in the morning. Things always do," he said to himself, when he found her interfering with his first sleep.

But it was not so different that he did not revoke his refusal of Mrs. Compton's invitation to her afternoon reception next day.

The rooms were unusually full. They were very pretty rooms—a happy medium between pathetic absurdity and hard common-sense ugliness. It was possible to cross the floor without breaking one's neck in the obscurity; and on the other hand it was not necessary that the guests should sit in rows like attendants at a country funeral. Mrs. Compton's afternoons were usually a success, but Meredith was conscious of a thrill of expectancy, a little hush in the talk, and a half-conscious turning towards the door every time it opened.

"You have recovered your usual health, I conclude!" Mrs. Compton remarked, with mild sarcasm. "After all, I am afraid Miss Maythorne is not coming."

Even while she spoke there was a complete hush in the buzz of talk as the girl crossed the threshold. People fell back so that there was a way opened between her and her hostess. Miss Maythorne passed through it without haste, and with no apparent consciousness of the curious eyes watching her.

"It is awfully good of you to come," Mrs. Compton said, taking the frankly out-thield hand in both hers.

"I promised, and I really wanted to. It is so seldom that my uncle is willing that I should accept invitations."

Meredith was watching her with critical eyes. Apparently she made no difference between her entrance on the stage of the Pantheon and a private parlour. She was equally at ease in either place, and it occurred to Meredith as he watched her that possibly she was no more unaccustomed to one place than to the other, and equally free from the shyness of small vanity in either.

Mrs. Compton, still holding her guest's hand, turned toward her cousin with a little triumphant air of assurance. The real presence of the girl was so much more than she had promised. Meredith could have laughed at her look of bewilderment and half-chagrin as she found her triumph forestalled.

Miss Maythorne's smile was something more than the conventional one of recognition. She did not look tired to-day. From head to foot she was staid and strong with vigorous health. His eyes were trained to note details. She wore a robe of violet velvet made in some fashion of long, straight lines; there was a soft swathing of white about her throat, but for the rest the lovely mass of colour and texture was unbroken. Every other woman in the room had her head disguised in a tangle

and frizzle of crimped and tortured locks. Miss Maythorne's hair was gathered in one single heavy braid coiled low in her neck, and held down by a crescent of diamonds. It grew so thick and so low on her forehead and temples, with little drooping, waving locks against her white skin, that all appearance of oddity was removed.

"I have been asking about you since last night," she said, brightly. "I know you made pictures, but now I know what pictures. Are you happy in your art?" with an air of straightforward shyness.

He was a little taken aback.

"If I ever did anything worth doing," he said, surprised into honesty. Self-depreciation was not one of Meredith's sins.

"Then you feel it, too. But you don't have to take the public into your confidence in everything. If a thing doesn't suit you, you can at least put it away. I do my best, and people have been very kind, but somehow—"

She had seated herself while she talked, quite unconsciously it seemed, and evidently expected Meredith to do the same. He was thinking shamefacedly of what he had thought and said the night before.

"Some one said you were very critical. I hope you were pleased last night." There was such real humility in it, and yet such a triumphant air of assurance, too, as of one who could not believe that all her personal popularity had no foundation in real success, that Meredith groaned within himself.

He took refuge in an ambiguity pointed with an inflection—a turn of speech, a smile—for which he despised himself, and yet found himself too cowardly to avoid.

"Do you like London?" breaking the silence that followed his speech. She sat as if thinking of what his words meant, trying to fathom what he had had in his mind. She answered him quite promptly.

"It bewilders me. It is too big. You know I have been used to only very small places. I never sang in opera before coming here. It seems to me sometimes that one finds bits of all the world here."

She talked in a childish fashion, perhaps the result of having to use a foreign speech, but its contrast with the grave Northern severity of her beauty stirred a sense of incongruity in Meredith's mind.

"And bits of all climates?"

"Ah, yes; it is dreadful!" with a gesture of the white, strong hand, the first he had seen of her make. It made him think of the florid airs of southern latitudes, and seemed still more out of keeping with her face and colouring. "It keeps me chilled and shivering. I ought to like ice and snow, and I can think of nothing but palms and sunshine."

Some one else came up. Miss Maythorne rose and left him with a bow and smile, a little different, he chose to fancy, from that she had given the new-comer. He had a sense that a new chapter was beginning for him; that meeting Miss Maythorne was not a casual incident to be swamped in the crowd of every day happenings.

That was in March. The opera season came to an end very shortly. Miss Maythorne lost none of her popularity.

There was always a struggle for seats on nights when favourite works were presented—always the same enthusiasm over the singer's appearance; always, to Meredith, that curious crudity and insufficiency for the parts she sustained.

The public did not seem to feel it; even the newspapers barely hinted at anything wanting. If they realised the lack, none of them had the courage to stem the tide of admiration that followed the singer into private life.

But in the few weeks that followed Meredith managed to see a good deal of Eleanor Maythorne. She really was a very busy woman, working conscientiously at her profession, and seeming to have little taste for, or interest in, general society, of which she might have had enough to satisfy the most insatiate. But there were little intervals at Mrs. Compton's,

measured by minutes often enough; other times after the evening's entertainment was over, and once a long half-hour at Mrs. Saville's.

Miss Maythorne had deliberately broken a dinner engagement for the sake of an interval of peace and quiet. She was in gala dress, of course—white as usual, but this time of velvet, the heavy, pliable stuff seemed so well to suit the grace of her long figure. She had a blaze of diamonds about her—on her breast, her arms, and in her hair. A critical woman might have pronounced their profusion stately and out of taste. To Meredith the cold, white splendour of the gems so suited her, that beyond a sense of pleasure at their fitness he never thought of them.

He talked his best; her silence was unusual. He thought she was listening, and found at last that she had fallen asleep. He smiled, dropped a soft white wrap over her as she lay half reclined among the cushions of a couch, and then sat down to deliberately study her face.

She woke after a little with a start, and found him watching her.

"I am so sorry," rising hastily to her feet. "It was so rude, Mr. Meredith. But, indeed, I am wearied out. It is a small excuse, and I am very, very sorry."

"Do not think of it," warmly. "I am not going to think I was such a bore that you couldn't keep your eyes open. I shall say to myself that you have let me be such a friend that you could afford to forget the restrictions of conventional politeness."

"It is quite true," she said, simply; "and I have not too many friends."

"You!" and yet he knew she told the truth.

"Mrs. Compton is, and Mrs. Saville; and one or two more—all ladies. I am glad that I have friends among women. But no one like yourself—I mean a man who has artist's work to do, and can understand that one must not think too much of one's self with the ideal before one."

She had taken an attitude he had seen often enough—one hand clasped tightly about the other wrist, her head bent a little, her long drapery coiled about her feet. Her stage life was so literally all she had that she carried its situations and expressions into her daily life, and never knew the difference. He never doubted her sincerity; he never thought of it as acting.

"Trust me," he said; and there, in the blaze of gaslight of a nineteenth century æsthetic drawing-room, dropped on one knee and touched his lips—not to her hand, but to the hem of her dress.

The door opened.

"It is not a rehearsal," Miss Maythorne said, with a pleased, soft laugh. She touched his forehead lightly with her soft palm.

"Rise, Sir Knight!" she said; and Meredith rose with a thrill of feeling that kept him cool and unembarrassed. Mrs. Saville looked at him with keen questioning, but read nothing. At least, judging from the rules that applied to other cases, there was nothing, because neither betrayed a shadow of self-consciousness.

"With ordinary mortals I should have said—" Mrs. Saville commented to herself, leaving a blank after the assertion; "but with such out-of-the-way people as artists and singers nobody knows what anything means."

During the time Meredith made two pictures of her—one as Marguerite, the other as Norma, a part that she looked to perfection and sang down to mediocrity. He had no formal sittings, of course, but there never was an instant when his whole soul was not given to the study of her wonderful beauty, its Northern type and Southern fire.

The respite allowed her after the close of her season was of the shortest. Apparently her uncle looked on her as an investment to be worked as perseveringly and continuously as possible while the opportunity lasted. Miss

Maythorne was hardly off the metropolitan boards before a provincial engagement was announced for her. Meredith heard of it the day after the little scene at Mrs. Saville's. Mrs. Compton expressed herself energetically.

"They are working her to death. I believe her uncle realizes that she will not last, and means to make the most of her. Have you ever seen him?"

"I had that pleasure last week," with a wry face.

"Did you ever see such a half-price edition of a hand?"

"How does it happen that people acknowledge him? I saw the Vincents and the Normans there last week."

"Don't ask me. Eleanor Maythorne is fit for anything. But as to her belongings—Heaven preserve them!"

During the weeks of her absence Meredith worked with unusual persistence. Norma and Marguerite were completed down to the last detail of mischievous and spinning-wheel, and he was busy with another canvas, on which he was spending the best of his artistic strength. He was a man to whom his art was a pastime, and not a necessity. If it had been, he might have accomplished something worth doing. As it was, a persistent and chronic state of self-distrust—which no man ever suspected—turned his canvases half finished to the wall. Society thought his real love for his art "interesting," called his laziness reticence, his real humility pride. Without being rich, he had enough to gratify his bachelor whims, and living in a careless, generous fashion, had the reputation of having much more money than he really did have.

One morning the newspaper chronicled Eleanor Maythorne's engagement to a young man whose money so far outweighed his brains that his real relation to his fortune was of the smallest importance. He threw down the sheet in disgust, tried his brushes, found them all wrong, shut his door with a bang, and went off to counsel with his cousin.

"Do you believe that story of Eleanor Maythorne's engagement?" he asked, abruptly.

"I believe her uncle would be delighted with it."

"But she—herself? She always seemed so much under his influence—doing just as he was told."

"No, I don't believe it. It is a newspaper fabrication. Cecil, why don't you—"

"Why don't I what?"

"Nothing," with a short laugh. "Go finish your picture."

He went, but not to his picture. He walked about all day, and came home in the dusk footsore and weary, but having settled matters with himself.

"It will come inevitably. It must. And then if she will take me. I can't ask her now in the full tide of her success."

He went and had his dinner after that, and smoked solitary cigars till his bedtime over his resolution, and thought himself magnanimous and heroic. Perhaps the magnanimity was cheap, after all. She had never given him so much as a hint that his suit would be listened to. He had hardly the courage to risk his cause at once. It was so much easier to indulge in an interval of half-hope than to cut himself off by changing doubt to certainty. And if she failed—and he should go to her in that crisis of pain and disappointment—she could not desert him—she could not misunderstand him.

Day by day he read the newspaper stories of her progress. It seemed to him that the vocabulary of adulation must be exhausted after awhile. Wherever she went the same story of overflowing houses and audiences wild with delight. At last it was over, and the party returned to town in July.

The heat was deadly. The city quivered in a furnace. Meredith, who had not shut up his studio, was away for a few days. A note from Mrs. Saville reached him.

"I have rescued our heroine from the hands of the powers that be, and she is actually

going to spend a few days with me in the country. Could you manage to make one of the party? She wants to see your pictures, too. Can't you bring Mrs. Compton, and give us a private view?"

He and Mrs. Compton went to his studio together. It was a large, wide, low, and airy room, quite at the top of a great building, and chosen for himself rather than for the public. Through the windows one caught a silver glimpse of the Thames and shining green woods. He spent a whole day in beautifying the place. Fresh draperies, an extravagance of flowers, a rearrangement of all his properties, with Mrs. Compton's feminine taste and tact to direct it all, kept him so busy that he had a bare half-hour of leisure to wait for the arrival of his guests.

He heard steps and voices on the stairs, and rose with great heart-throbs. Mrs. Saville—Alan Hawley, a couple of esthetic grey-green gowns, with presumably young women inside them, and last—Eleanor Maythorne.

The heavy portiere dropped behind her as she stood relieved against the dark background, a white figure—radiant, graceful, gracious. The summer heats shone in her wide blue eyes, and heightened the faint roses of her cheeks.

She had a look of being curiously and intensely alive as she stood taking in the vista of the rooms with pleased eyes.

Then there came a few minutes of greetings, questions, and answers, and then the serious business of the occasion began.

Marguerite and Norma were seen and approved. Miss Maythorne herself was rather silent.

Indeed, her old, happy trick of talking about everything seemed to have deserted her.

Meredith fancied, now that the first flush of greeting was over, that she looked worn and thoughtful.

They had gone the round of the rooms, and had paused near the door of a small alcove while Hawley and the grey-green gowns went on and left them.

"I have something to show you," with his hand on the curtain that draped the door. He spoke half-appealingly, feeling at the minute a curious, humble sense of unworthiness.

And then the curtain fell behind them, and Miss Maythorne stood face to face with the canvas that had filled most of his time during the summer weeks.

A flat northern landscape buried in snow out to the edge of the cold, grey sea. Over it a dark, low sky—a storm whirling down out of the vague remoteness beyond.

And, somehow, out of the dimness a woman's head and shoulders taking shape—the head and shoulders of a queen, royal in pride, and strength, and beauty. And the face was Eleanor Maythorne's at its best; the dim, half-luminous stars crowning the sweeping tresses shone over eyes prophetic of coming grief; the sweet lips shut in lines that held the consciousness of sorrow not to be spoken—a something unutterable, apart for ever.

There was silence in the little room. He looked at her at last, timidly. The real sea-blue eyes whose tints he had worked so hard to catch were full of tears.

"It is very beautiful," she said. "And—it is prophetic."

"What do you mean?"

She had thrown herself back against the wall, her hands clasped behind her. The attitude was expressive of fatigue, not only bodily but mental.

"Mr. Meredith," slowly and bitterly, "I am a failure."

His heart gave a bound.

"I am sure I read nothing but one long chronicle of successes from beginning to end. You are tired—the weather—your constant journeyings—"

"Yes," she said, "I am tired, but—they will find me out."

He had nothing to say. He looked back at his picture.

"Don't you see?" with a faint smile. "You builded better than you knew when you painted that. Her stars are fading—she ought never to have worn them—and the storm is coming down."

A grey-green gown appeared, as a hand lifted the screening curtain. Eleanor Maythorne turned away to hide her face. Meredith dropped a cover over the picture.

"You are going to allow yourself a holiday now, I hope," he said, politely, as if continuing a conversation.

And then the grey-green gown found itself bowed out without having entered the place at all.

"For a few weeks. Mrs. Saville has been good enough to invite me to her house for a little while, and after that, I believe, we are to go among the woods somewhere. Think of never having seen a real wood, except from railway carriage windows!"

"You have a great deal before you."

He did not look at her as he spoke. He could not trust himself. He hated to see a woman cry, under any circumstances; and the thought of Eleanor Maythorne's tears was more than he could stand.

There was a luncheon waiting for them, and then they all went down to the station together; and Cecil Meredith held her hand an instant in his as they said good-bye, and once more caught that look in her eyes.

After a day or two he went to Mrs. Saville's. The house was very quiet. As yet, there were only Allen Hawley and a niece of Mrs. Saville's—a quiet, pretty, ladylike girl, who worshipped Eleanor, and did not see a possible lover in Meredith, for which he was grateful to her.

In those few days—only three or four, before he was called away—he studied Eleanor Maythorne in the strongest light that his twenty-seven years of London life could throw on her—studied her as a man studies the woman he loves when life has cured him of illusions.

They were sitting on the bank of the river one morning. Miss Maythorne wore her usual white dress. A broad hat shaded her face, and under it shone the heavy amber braids of her hair.

"And you are never homesick for the sound of your native speech—your native sea and mountains?"

"I have hardly had time for that. Everything has been so new. You will hardly realize that until I came to London I had not seen a score of strangers in my life."

"But you had your artistic training away from home?"

"You call it that," with a slight laugh. "So did I once. My artistic training," with the first touch of sarcasm he had ever heard in her voice, "was given me at home. How long do you think it can last?" with a direct appeal suddenly breaking up her voice.

"My dear Miss Maythorne!" startled and pained.

She was looking away from him, her hands clasped on her knee, wrung hard together, he could see by the whitened finger-tips and swollen veins, but her voice was even and monotonous—a dead repression in it.

"Of course, I see more and more plainly that it is only a whim of the public. I am pretty—well, more than that, if you choose—it can't matter much in the end. Think of my going before those great houses with just that as a reason. And, by-and-by, they will tire of me, and then they will tell me so. If I could only go away now—before the dreadful end comes."

"Miss Maythorne!"

"I can't sing—you know I can't," not heeding him. "Tell me the truth. No, you needn't," bitterly. "How can a man say such a thing to a woman? But I know it. I am only twenty years old, Mr. Meredith, and I was as ignorant of the world as a baby."

"My poor child!" and lifted her hand to his lips. He would have asked her then and

there to leave the life she was leading. The words were almost spoken, but the look on her face stopped him. Pure surprise had sent a flush to her face. Clearly, she had no more idea of his state of mind than of something in another state of existence. His heart failed him, and then the chance was gone.

A servant came with a telegram. He read and rose hastily.

"I must go. You will pardon me. My uncle is dying," and she rose, too, with concern and sympathy in her eyes.

Meredith was away for a month. Not only his uncle, but his uncle's son, had been victims of a steamer explosion. That piece of carelessness on the part of the "experienced engineer" had the result of making Cecil Meredith so rich a man that he felt himself not a little bewildered. There were a good many legal intricacies to be got through, and Meredith had not much time for anything else, till a letter from Mrs. Compton roused him:—

"And what do you think has happened now? Miss Maythorne has gone for a provincial tour—I mean in a professional way. A week after you left the commanding pirate made the engagement without a word of consultation with her. She was just ready for her trip when he came and told her. And the worst of it is that the provincial audiences do not seem to be in any degree enraptured. On the contrary, judging from the newspapers, they are decidedly cool. Can it be the beginning of the end? Anyway, I'm sorry for its effect on Eleanor. It can only be a question of time, I'm afraid, and it is my constant hope that she will marry and leave the stage before the end comes. Somehow it is borne in upon me that that is precisely what she is expected to do—that she is looked at in the light of a matrimonial investment."

Meredith tossed the letter away. The impulse to go to her was overmastering. He would have used every art to win her, flinging the sheen of his new riches in the eyes of her guardian, hoping that so he might clear the way of mercenary opposition.

But I think he was a coward at heart. He did not believe she loved him, and he dared not face her "no." He would wait a little longer, when, if he won her, she should not seem to others to be sacrificing anything; when she should not seem even to herself to have been sought by him for anything but herself.

The man was a gentleman, but he underestimated the woman whom he loved. He owned it to himself quite frankly. He loved her, and could wait. As to what the waiting might do for her estimate of him, he had not thought as far as that. With all his humility, he had not questioned that by-and-by he would win her. He was so in earnest in his purpose.

Early in November Miss Maythorne made her reappearance in London. To Meredith there seemed a change in the temperament of the house that greeted her. But there was no observable falling off in numbers, and the bursts of applause, if not quite so spontaneous as before, were little less hearty to all seeming.

He did not go on the stage that night. He had not the nerve to meet her. He fancied an almost-desperate look in her eyes, as though she saw the coming shadow near and close; and the next day he was called away again and went, anathematizing lawyers and all their works.

Before he returned he was the recipient of a half-hysterical letter from Mrs. Compton:—

"It has come. I knew it would. If only there was anything to be done. One night, from pure overwork I believe, Eleanor Maythorne fainted on the stage. If she had stopped there! But in three days he had her back at work again. I saw her in the afternoon, and she was absolutely hoarse from a cold. That night she was singing in *Norma*, and in that 'Casta Diva' thing, that I shall hate to the end of my days, her voice broke—a complete squeal. If she had had the pre-

sence of mind to be carried off in a stage swoon! But she just stood there facing the house, white as a ghost, with her eyes wide open, as if she had been facing a horrible death. They rang the curtain down, and I got out of the house somehow. I don't know how they finished the evening. I haven't cared look at the papers. I haven't seen her, since—she would see nobody. Would you believe it, in ten days she was billed again. I could not go. Frank did, and he says the house was not half filled. And now the newspapers have found out. I enclose you a criticism that makes me guilty of murder in my heart.—do, do."

The article was written from the heights of judicial calm. It was quite time, the man of the pen thought, that a woman who had the effrontery to present a pretty face and good figure as an equivalent for art training should be taught that the public would not accept such a shameless imposition. The musical taste of the opera-going public had been so thoroughly and truly educated that nothing of the kind would be tolerated.

It was what they had all prophesied. She herself had looked forward to just such a conclusion. And yet now that it had come it struck him with a keenness which he had no strength to bear. He flung everything aside; his unfinished business must wait. She had suffered, and he had not been near her. All at once every doubt and shadow of hesitation vanished. He would go to her—make her understand the depth of his devotion—claim her in such a fashion that she must know that there was no shadow of doubt on his loyalty.

He went back straight to his studio. He had given no warning of his coming, and he found the place in the disarray that is the usual result of an absent proprietor. He raised the curtain from before his Storm Queen, and a cloud of dust followed the action. The sad, inscrutable eyes had a newer and more intense meaning in them, and he dropped the screen with a half-groan.

Eleanor had taken refuge with Mrs. Saville, he learned, and went straight to the house. He was denied at first, but day after day he presented himself, and at length she promised to see him.

She rose to greet him as he entered the room with some faint pretence of a smile, but it faded as he approached her. And then, as if even the courage to keep up the seeming of conventional appearances had failed her, she sank back with a little inarticulate wail, and covered her face with her hands.

"Don't," he said, with a choke in his own voice. "It is not so hopeless. You have your life before you."

He stood looking down pitifully at her as she covered in her chair.

"Yes," with a gasp, dropping her hands in her lap; "but to be convicted of being an impostor, and to be forced to own the justice. I have my life before me, and that in it."

"And you have been brooding over this all these days! Miss Maythorne, you told me once you had few friends. Suppose those few look on what has happened as something outside yourself—something that does not touch you—that you are nearer and dearer to every one of them than if you had gone on in the full tide of your success?"

"My friends are very kind," with lips that trembled a little. "I am afraid I can't talk about it much. I did not want you to see me yet, Mr. Meredith."

"I know," humbly; "but I had so much that I wanted to say—I mean of so much consequence to myself. It is only a few words, after all, Eleanor. I love you—I want you to be my wife."

She looked at him with eyes that grew wider as she gazed.

"I am afraid I don't understand," she said, coldly.

He had to repeat his words, feeling, with every breath, how little chance was left to him.

She was standing when he finished. An uncrowned queen, but not the less a queen. She waited a minute after he had ceased speaking.

"I thank you for what, I suppose, most women might consider an honour. For myself, I can only look at it as a charity, and I am hardly come to charity yet."

"You called me your friend!" he pleaded.

"And you are doing your best to make me forget it!" a touch of vehemence rising in her voice. "Good-bye, Mr. Meredith. Please go while I can think of you as meaning kindly, in spite of your mistake."

He touched his lips to the hand she held out, and then he went away without another word.

Two years afterwards Cecil Meredith, just landed from a long voyage, was talking again with Mrs. Compton. He had grown older, looked worn and weighted, as if some overmastering purpose kept him in vain pursuit of something he could not attain.

"And you have never heard of her!" Mrs. Compton asked.

"Not one word. You know I have left nothing undone. I saw her uncle—coaxed, bribed, bullied him. He declares she is dead. I don't believe it."

"What will you do next?"

"I don't know. Follow any clue that comes up. I shall wait. I have exhausted everything now. If she is alive I will find her."

Mrs. Compton sighed.

"I'm afraid it will be useless. And your best years are going."

"It's no use talking of it," he said, doggedly. "The world is not so large that a woman like that is easily lost in it."

He had some call of business quite at the lower end of the city, and went about it that night, weary as he was, and with the worst of March weather making outdoor life a burden.

There was a raw, chilling wind blowing off the river; underfoot an inch of half-melted snow made walking next to an impossibility. The buses were crowded to their utmost; everybody was damp and uncomfortable, and almost everybody was cross.

Wrapped in his furs, Meredith sat at the end of the bus, taking little note of his fellow-passengers till a sudden jolt and lurch gave those who were standing all they could do to keep their footing. In the crowd at the other end he saw a woman's hand thrust suddenly up to catch at a swinging strap. The hand was ungloved, slender, white and strong. The shabby wristlet of dark fur emphasised its characteristics. Meredith gazed a minute as if fascinated, then rose and slowly made his way towards her.

It was just at the hour when the shops and factories were setting free their employes. Nearly all the passengers were of that class, and before he had reached the end of the bus a workman had vacated his seat for the girl. She had drawn on her gloves again—a heavy, coarse woollen pair—and a thick veil covered her face. As she sat there was little to distinguish her from a dozen other women who were about her. But Meredith noted a roll of music in her hand, and watchful as he was he did not allow the faintest clue to escape him.

He left the bus before she did, but crowded as it was it was not difficult to keep it in sight and mark those who left it. She alighted presently, and Meredith's heart was in his throat. There was one other woman who stepped with such an air, whose height and figure were the same. It was not the first time he had caught vainly at a resemblance, but not the less he kept the retreating form in sight.

It was only for a few squares. She turned suddenly, and entered the lighted vestibule of a music hall.

There was a great blaze of gas in the small hall, and a poster announced the names of the performers for that evening. Meredith recognised none of the names—he did not

pect to; but he went and bought a ticket, and took a place in the remotest corner of the hall.

The place was well filled with working-men and mechanics, and their wives and sweet-hearts. The songs were largely of the sentimental sort, and were loudly applauded.

Singer after singer came and went. Then there was a little stir and buzz among the people about him, and a white-dressed figure came upon the stage. Meredith glanced up, looked away, and dared not raise his eyes again. It was Eleanor.

He left the hall when the song was done. Persuasion and entreaty secured an interview with the manager, but with no very satisfactory results.

Miss Andersen taught music, and now and then as a favour sang at the hall. He declined to give her address, or allow Meredith to see her. He would take a message, and Cecil scribbled on his card a request that her friends might be allowed to come to her. Then he went out into the night.

A good many weeks later Miss Maythorne, very white and wasted, sat in a pretty room in Mrs. Compton's house.

"I am strong enough to hear all about it now," she said, in a curiously-subdued way.

"Well, there isn't much to tell. When we found that you were not going to answer Cecil's message, he took me to the place where you used to sing. I did my very best with your friend the manager, and I think I made an impression. He said you were ill, but he must talk it over with his wife before he told me where you were. She came to see me herself the next day, and the end of it was that we had you brought here."

"They were always kind to me," with tears in her eyes.

"And I was about to suggest that we invite them to see you married next week."

"Married! Next week!"

"Cecil thinks it would be better to try a sea voyage, and we can go out with him, you know."

So Mr. and Mrs. Fergusson really did attend a quiet wedding the next week, and Mr. and Mrs. Cecil Meredith's names appeared among the outgoing passengers.

And if among those who frequent Mrs. Meredith's pleasant receptions during the short, brilliant Roman winter there are any who recognise her as Eleanor Maythorne, they feel that her career has culminated in the happy wife and perfect hostess.

[THE END.]

SHEEP WASHING IN SUSSEX.

FIRST went the lumbering, picturesque old cart, then the sheep were driven from the fold and turned into the lane, along which they crawled until they came to the mill stream. Then a huge barrel was placed in the water and lashed to the bank, and one of the men got into it.

The sheep were driven up on one side and guarded by several men, while the shepherd raised a great ewe in his arms and threw it head foremost into the rivulet. As it rose, the watchful man in the barrel grasped it by the back and ducked it several times. Escaping from his hands, the poor half-drowned creature rushed towards a cut in the bank and so escaped to dry land. This process was gone through with all the sheep.

Whether it was due to their natural stupidity or the muddling effect of the water on the brain, many of them blundered into the stream again, and tried to escape by a steep ascent on the other side. Then a man, planted on the farther shore and armed with an iron hook on a ten-foot pole, crooked the wandering sheep to land.

Many of them needed assisting up the slippery bank, and very comical it was to see their weak-kneed struggles to gain the meadow. They appeared utterly unable to account for the enormous additional weight of their

water-soaked wool; and as they stood huddled together in the puddles from their streaming sides, the bleating lambs did not appear to know their own mothers.

The next day the flock was driven into a new fold in the hillside pasture, where the process of sheering commenced.

All of the well-washed sheep were in turn deprived of their heavy winter coats. As they left the shearers' hands it did not seem possible that these poor lean creatures could be the round balls of wool we were accustomed to see. Every shorn lamb gazed at its clipped and unclipped sisters with a vague, solemn look, wondering what was coming next.

After the ordeal they were turned into the brightest meadow on the farm, and probably soon forgot the break of those two days in their monotonous life of nibbling.

The numerous flocks of sheep in Sussex give a pastoral effect to many of the delightful pictures of upland and lowland, so characteristic of southern England.

COCKROACHES.

BLACK beetles (cockroaches) are everywhere multitudinous in all their habits and tropical in their obliquities. No one likes them—except hedgehogs; but it is difficult to establish intimate relations between cockroaches and hedgehogs.

The latter cannot creep into the chinks where the former hide; besides, hedgehogs are not suitable creatures for having loose in the house at night.

Various powders and mixtures have been concocted with laborious ingenuity on purpose to destroy them, but the insects do not seem to suffer very acutely from such preparations. There are also traps patented to catch them, but it would seem that the inventors have omitted to patent the kind of cockroaches which are to be caught in them. In the kitchen, therefore, they are serious enough, but on board ship they are far worse.

No sooner does night fall than they come forth in their myriads, and in solemn procession stalk forth, one behind the other, along the edges of the bunk and up and down the walls. They try to creep along the ceiling, and fall with a dreadful sound upon the floor. They find out clothes hanging in the cabin and ensconce themselves in the folds and go to sleep there.

The creatures can fly, too, the males at any rate, but with such inadequate judgment that their excursions end anywhere—in the basin, on the pillow, in the lamp—except where they should.

Nor is the purpose of their existence obvious. No useful end appears to be served by the nibbling of shoes, books, clothes and property generally.

There seems no very wise provision of nature in the existence of an insect that preys upon the furniture of the house and the contents of the larder.

Short-sighted humanity, therefore, has grown to dislike them. In Austria and Germany, for instance, the people opprobriously call them Russians.

In the Czar's dominions they call them Prussians. Yet, as they are found to be most numerous in places that are best furnished with eatables, they have come to be considered, on the Continent, emblematic of prosperity, and the common people look upon them with a superstitious respect.

The insect is really an invader from the East, an Asiatic foreigner, who, though smaller than the native black beetle, has expelled the aborigines.

Men are more civilised by their pleasure than by their occupation. Business dispenses not only with ceremony, but often with common civility; and we should become rude, repulsive, and ungracious did we not recover in our recreations the urbanity which in the bustle of our labours we disregard.

WHEN CHARLIE SAW ME HOME.

THE stars shone bright one autumn evening,
And the air was clear and cool;
The boys were home from summer camping,
And we all would leave for school
And college in a few more days,
All of us going different ways.

Fred went to church with me that evening—

He was the oldest of the boys;
He used to call me "baby sister,"
And bring me little childish toys,
And quite ignored my sixteen years
Until I sometimes came to tears.

Fred's college chum lived in the village;

His sister was engaged to Fred;
Than me she was just two years older,
But I was taller half a head.
Sometimes it nearly drove me wild,
They treated me so like a child.

That night, when church was over, Charlie

Stood with his sister at the door;
"Come, Sue," said Fred; "let's leave the children;

Charlie and Bess walk on before.
You see her home; and I'll take Sue."
Said Charlie, "That I meant to do."

We walked out under the dusky trees;

I was so vexed I almost cried.
And yet I liked to be with Charlie,
And that could not well be denied.
"It was very unkind of brother Fred
To send you home with me," I said.

"You would have chosen some one else

If he'd not spoken so to you."
"And, how do you know that, little one?"
I know Fred loves my sister Sue,
And it were not strange if he should guess:
How well I love his sister Bess."

I could not say a single word;

I looked at him in glad surprise.
"You'll be my wife?" he whispered, low—
"I read your answer in your eyes;
Now kiss me if you love me, Bess."
He kissed me as I murmured "Yes."

'Tis long years since that autumn evening

Glad, happy years they've been to me.
For we were true to the promise given,
And I'll ne'er regret what'er may be
That kiss I gave while the stars shone bright,
When Charlie saw me home that night.

A K.

HAD WE NEVER LOVED SO BLINDLY.

—O—

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FOR an instant the Firs looked so silent and quiet that Flora had quite a pang in her heart lest Eustace Trevanion should be really very bad. Perhaps her guardian had been keeping the truth from her when he said he was not quite so well as usual, and then went on to ask with interest after her experiences in Paris.

The footman gave a loud knock and opened the carriage door. She sprang out without waiting for Winter to open the other. A sudden gust of wind whirled a few dead leaves round her feet, and all her pleasurable anticipations seemed chilled. She forgot the presents, she forgot all the heap of things she had been looking forward so to saying, and turned such an anxious face towards him that Winter, surprised at finding the newly-made bride on the doorstep, exclaimed,—

"Lor, my lady, I hope there's nothing the matter!"

She held out her hand to the old servant, reassured by his question; for if her brother had been ill he would have thought it most natural that she should drive down to see him.

"Nothing, thanks, only as my brother didn't come to me I was obliged to go to him. Are you quite well? and are all the ladies in?"

"Yes, my lady, thank you. I've had a touch of rheumatism, but that's owing to the east wind. Walk into the drawing-room please."

He threw open the door with a swing, and announced in his loudest tones, as if proud of the honour, "Lady Fane!"

Instantly there was a commotion, a chair was upset as the twins rushed forward to greet her. She kissed them both affectionately, and allowed herself to be clasped in Mrs. Willoughby's arms, but all the while she was looking beyond them to the sofa where Eustace was lying, supported by his right elbow. He was watching her with eager eyes that shone with joy, and the next minute she was kneeling beside him, her arms round his neck, the tears raining from her eyes.

"Come, Flo, I say, don't do that; there's no occasion for waterworks. And what a swell you are looking in your furs!" stroking the long sealskin Newmarket, which was topped by a small toque of the same fur which set off the fairness of her skin.

They crowded round her whilst she squeezed herself on to the small portion of the sofa left by the invalid's long legs, and sitting by his side undid the many packages which she had sent for out of the carriage. Her fears about her brother being relieved, she was like a child displaying her treasures, and there were ecstatic cries of delight as one pretty thing after another was brought out and presented. Emily and Jenny were delighted with lovely mantles in the pink of fashion, Mrs. Willoughby was charmed with a Parisian bonnet, which suited her exactly. There was a pin for Mr. Willoughby's scarf, which he was to wear for the future, instead of his old-fashioned tie, and various pretty nick-nacks to adorn the rooms, and give them a touch of elegance.

"And then, dear, here's a bag for you when you begin to travel, which I hope will be next year," she said, with a grave, sweet smile. "I daresay you will know a great deal more about Paris than I do by next October, and perhaps you'll get as far as Italy," which he never did.

"It is a beauty!" exclaimed Mrs. Willoughby, as the bag was opened and all its solid silver fittings disclosed to view, and then she sighed as she looked from the bag to the boy's delicate face. "He will never live to use it," she reflected. "They might just as well have given him an Alpine stock, or a trapeze."

But Flora was indignant with her for that sigh, and talked of the wonders Sir Cavendish was to do for him, as if his cure were certain, and the road to it without pain.

"And where is Sir Basil?" asked Emily. "I suppose he didn't care about turning out after dinner?"

"Indeed, he would have come, only Philip Fane dropped in with Mr. Willoughby, and he was obliged to stay with them out of politeness. But he is coming directly," with a cheerful smile.

"Oh! dear," said Emily, looking at her sister. "I wish we had on better dresses. I've got a darn right in the front. Don't you think we had better change?"

"Yes; I could do it in three minutes," and Jenny sprang to the door.

"No, no! Basil won't see it. Never mind, it is much too late," Flora expostulated; but she was a married woman, and was supposed to have forgotten what she might feel in the girls' place.

Mr. Fane might come in, as Mrs. Willoughby suggested, and it never did to be caught by a single man at a disadvantage.

"It never does to be caught by a double man," said Flora, with a merry laugh. "I never let Basil get the better of me."

"And you are happy, my dear?"

"Oh! so happy," with a sigh of contented longing, and then she added, softly, "There never was a husband like mine."

"I always said so from the first," cried

Eustace, triumphantly. "He is a trump, if ever there was one. It was a clever dodge of mine tumbling into that pond. It led to your first introduction."

"It very nearly led to something else," and Mrs. Willoughby looked grave. "Don't you think you had better go to bed? You didn't sleep last night."

"No, the thought of Flo's coming got into my head," squeezing her hand with his slender fingers, "though I'm 'nobody nowheres' now. What is a brother compared to a husband?"

"I don't think Flora will ever cease to make a fuss with you. You've been the apple of her eye all her life, and she has spoilt you through thick and thin."

"I wonder I'm not insufferable," leaning back on his pillows, with a smile.

"Perhaps you are, only I forgot to tell you so."

Flora felt perfectly happy as she sat there telling them amusing anecdotes of their fellow-travellers, whilst the twins were beautifying themselves.

"Oh! Eustace, if you had only been with us!"

"My dear!" from the matron; "on a honeymoon?"

"Yes, why not?" with a playful pout. "I would have quarrelled with Basil at once if he ventured to hint that Eustace was *de trop*."

"You see she can't get along without using a French word," a mischievous twinkle in his eyes, and then the door opened, and in came Mr. Willoughby, with Sir Basil's tall form towering behind him, and Philip Fane, calm, cold, and supercilious, looking over his shoulder. It was a pretty picture which met their eyes in that pleasant room lighted by the mellow light of an old-fashioned moderator.

There was Mrs. Willoughby sitting by the table, the light falling on her smooth, fair hair neatly gathered under her white lace cap, and the knitting-needles which she was plying with almost unconscious industry, whilst a little to the left was the high-bred face of Eustace Trevanion, with a red cushion behind his straw-coloured head, an old red shawl thrown over his legs, and the lovely young bride close beside him, her seal-skin cloak falling from her shoulders, her white neck looking dazzling in spite of its string of pearls against the dark fur.

Emily and Jenny came in, look gorgeous in their best dresses, and Philip Fane devoted himself to them in such a gratifying manner that each flattered herself that he thought she was looking nice.

"So they are going to take that boy to town next week?" with a look towards the sofa.

"Yes, if he is well enough, and Flo says we must come up and pay them a visit," said Emily, with glee.

"I am sure I hope you will. London is duller than any ditch that was ever invented, and what I shall do with Lady Fane I can't conceive."

"What do you mean?" asked Jenny, gravely, thinking the less bachelors had to do with married women the better.

"I mean when that boy slips the hooks. He will as sure as fate. And as she only married on his account it will be no end of a sell."

"She was in love with Sir Basil from the very first," and Emily looked shocked. "And as to Eustace, he is going to be cured. They talk of his going to Paris next year."

"I think he will take a shorter journey and in a shorter time. Are they blind? He's a shadow to what he was. I was a good deal mixed up with some medical students once, and walked the hospitals for a joke. I know all the signs. Look at his lips, they are not red but purple; look at his eyes, they look as if they had a glittering light inside them; look at his bones, there isn't an ounce of flesh upon them."

"Hush, Flora will hear you!" looking round in alarm.

"No, she never does; but she will listen to me some day. Do you believe in presentiments, Miss Willoughby?" applying the name to both by a movement of his eyes. "I believe that you and I will live to see curious changes at Greylands. First there will be sorrow, then coldness, then jealousy, then death, but which of the trio will die, Basil, Flora, or myself, I can't say."

"Oh, Mr. Fane, what nonsense you talk!" cried Emily, with a shiver. "You are not a gipsy! You can't tell fortunes!"

"No, but I can influence them. I can help to make my stories come true, which is more than the gipsies do when they scan a stranger's hand at the Derby. Come to London and watch. It is grand fun to look on at a game if you are quite sure to understand it."

"I don't know anything about the game," said Jenny, "but I should like to go to London and see the theatres, and all there is to be seen."

"And I should be proud to be your escort," with a low bow.

"Flora, your brother's tired, we had better be off," Sir Basil whispered in her ear.

She gave a startled look at Eustace's face; all the colour had left it as his excitement died out, and surely it was very thin and drawn.

She bade him good-night gravely, and promised to run down to see him in the morning. Then they went away, Philip saying he would enjoy a cigar and a stroll in the moonlight.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SIR BASIL and Lady Fane had no time for dinner-parties or balls before they left again for London taking Eustace Trevanion with them.

Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby shook their heads, and said he was not strong enough to stand it; but Flora was dying to have him cured, and her husband was so anxious to please her, that neither would listen to reason.

His own home in Hyde Park-gardens had been made ready for them in a hurry. Sir Basil laughed at the old-fashioned furniture, which yet was not old enough to pass muster with the aesthetes. He said that as soon as they had a leisure moment they would furnish it in such a style that Oscar Wilde would lose his senses for envy; but, for the present, they must put up with comfort at the expense of style.

There was no time lost in seeing after the purpose which had brought them to town.

Sir Cavendish Brown, who had but just returned from Kissingen, called the next day, and after a short interview with his patient, recommended a week's rest.

"But surely it would be better for him to have the evil removed as soon as possible, and to rest afterwards?" suggested Flora, in her eagerness to have him just like other men.

But the grave old surgeon shook his head.

"Too much haste would ruin everything. We must get up his strength, my dear lady, so we shall certainly do him no harm but good."

Flora had to submit, and trust a man who knew so much better than herself. No matter could have been kinder or taken more care.

She took him out for a drive every day at first, and pointed out with interest how the grand houses which had been closed for the quiet months were now beginning to open their eyes. Blinds were drawn up, shutters opened, windows cleaned. Gradually the carriages increased in the Park, the horses in the Row, and they began to feel that London was no longer a desert.

They visited the Doré Gallery, where Eustace sat on the velvet cushions for half-an-hour in quiet enjoyment; and went to one or two other places where there were but a few pictures on view. She even proposed to take him to the Fisheries, but Sir Basil remonstrated,—

"My dear, a drive is too much for him. How could he stand a crowd of people and the noise of a band?"

Flora gave it up with a sigh. When they were children they had always had magnificent plans as to the amount they were to see or do during their first visit to London. But now the visit had come off, and they could do nothing.

The week came to an end, and Sir Cavendish Brown proposed to wait a little longer. The weather changed and became cold and wet, and when the carriage came round it was generally sent away empty, for Eustace said it was pleasant on the sofa in the study than sitting out where there was no sunshine. Sir Basil, knowing that his wife's spirits were drooping, proposed to send for the Miss Willoughbys, but Flora said,—

"No, let us wait till afterwards, when we can take them about and make them enjoy themselves. They will want to go to the theatre and to concerts. So they must wait."

"Eustace, now come down yet?" asked Sir Basil in surprise, as he came in to luncheon after a visit to the tailor.

"No, he said he was tired, so I had a fire lighted in the drawing-room. The quieter he keeps the stronger he must get—that stands to reason, doesn't it?" with a wistful glance up into his face, as if for encouragement.

"It seems natural. There ought to be no exhaustion in perfect rest," and he laid his hand tenderly on her curls, afraid of speaking the fears which were weighing on his mind.

Philip East appeared that afternoon, and Flora came down to the drawing-room to give him five o'clock tea, whilst Sir Basil stayed with her brother.

It was a very dull afternoon, and there was little light in the room, except that which came from the fire. As the flames shot up every now and then amongst the coals a ray of ruddy light fell on Flora's face, and he could see as he sat opposite to her how pale and sad it had grown. Her beauty was the same as ever, but sorrow had chastened it, and altered its character, and he felt as if it were all his cousin's fault. If he had married her he would have taken her to the south of France, to Italy, to Rome—where she would have shone like a star amongst her compatriots. He would have whirled her about from one scene of dissipation to another, till she had forgotten this sickly invalid, and all the melancholy thoughts she had left behind in England.

"Your brother is not as well as you hoped?" he said, hesitatively, thinking it was real kindness to make her see the true state of the case.

"Well, I don't know. I think he finds London relaxing. He must be better, you know, really," she said, with a smile, "because he has done nothing but rest."

"But is he better?" looking her straight in the face, whilst she kept her eyes fixed on her tea-cup.

"The pain was very bad last night, but it is easier—certainly easier to-day. I suppose Sir Cavendish Brown is sure to understand his case?"

"I daresay he understands it thoroughly, but these doctors think it part of their vocation to keep their opinions to themselves. Have you considered how you will stand to your husband supposing the operation fails?"

"I don't understand you," raising her eyes, with a puzzled expression in their depths.

"What has Basil got to do with it?"

"He had everything to do with it, as far as I understood the matter," with a peculiar smile on his thin lips. "Was not Trevanion's cure used as the bait to secure his sister?"

The colour rose in her cheeks. She could not forget that she had really accepted Sir Basil in the first instance because she wanted to be with her brother and nurse him after the operation. Her love for her brother was undoubtedly the one thing that had spurred her on to a prompt acceptance, but there was a great deal of love for Sir Basil behind it, and

she never meant to confess to anyone—least of all to Philip—that he had not been her first thought.

"I don't think any bait was needed," she said, slowly.

"You don't like to confess it, but there was; and I say Basil must look to himself if this little scheme fails. He will have won you under false pretences."

"Nothing of the sort," lifting her head, defiantly. "He is good to everybody—not only to Eustace. He saved our lives in the first place—perhaps you forget that."

"No, I don't," suddenly. "Fortune has favoured him in every way. Was he the only man who would have risked his life to save you?"

"He was the only man who did. He was the only one who ever troubled himself to wonder if Eustace could be cured. Even good, kind Mr. Willoughby accepted his lameness as a misfortune which couldn't be amended."

"Because he was a high-minded man, with no ulterior motive. Basil worked upon your feelings—he held up a dazzling impossibility before your eyes. Bewildered, puzzled, wild with the new hope, you said, 'Give me this and I will be your wife.' Then, when you were scarcely conscious of what you were saying or doing, he wrang your almost involuntary consent from your lips. And to carry on the farce he has lugged the poor boy up to town, when he might have had a chance, perhaps, if he had only been allowed to be quiet. He parades a heap of doctors before your eyes to prove to you that he is doing his best, and all the while he knows that he might just as well throw the doctors' faces into the Serpentine. He cannot cure the boy, but he must redeem his word. That is the position, and you've got to face it."

"I won't," rising from her seat, in great agitation, "it isn't true—he shall be cured. Oh! Heaven, he shall be!"

"If I could only cure him I'd cut off my right hand to do it," putting down his cup, and coming close to her side. "Flora, you must believe that—you couldn't imagine that I was fiend-enough not to wish the poor fellow to pull through."

It was horrible, but she had a fancy that he would be pleased—rather than not—to find that the operation had failed.

"Flora, answer me! Could I have any motive for wishing harm to the boy?"

"How can I tell? You seem to wish to make me miserable; I don't know why," looking down into the fire, with wet lashes.

"By Heaven! that's too unfair!" he exclaimed, with sudden excitement. "You haven't forgiven me because I told you that Basil had no right to marry you. He has no right, and some day I will prove it to you. It will be in my power then to drag him from your arms. Don't you think you had better be more civil to me now? Don't you think a kind word now and then might be of use?"

"A kind word, when you are my enemy?" drawing up her neck.

"Not yours!" looking down into her eyes.

"My husband and I are one," defiantly.

"At present—yes."

"For ever!"

"A woman's for ever—six months. Some day you will cry to me for pity; but I shall remember that you always hated me. Good-bye!"

He pressed her hand tight, then hurriedly departed, leaving her a prey to mingled feelings of terror and disgust.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"Beware this sort of thing, you know, I think it is better to make a will," said Eustace, the day before the one fixed for the operation, "so give me a piece of paper, and we'll draw it up between us. I daresay Basil would send for a lawyer."

"Oh, no, dear! Don't bother yourself about

that," said Flora, with an inward shudder. "You mustn't tire yourself about anything to-day."

"I must do this. I shouldn't like all my pet things to go to the wrong people. Now, Flo, don't be silly," as he saw her lip trembling. "I shan't die a bit the sooner for it, and it will be such a relief to my mind."

Without a remonstrance she fetched a piece of paper and a pencil, and then placed another cushion behind his back. She felt as if she could not bear it as he wrote down one thing after another with a name against it.

Nobody was forgotten; even George, the gardener's boy at the Elm, who had so often drawn his chair, was remembered, and then, when she thought he had come to an end, a pale pink rose in his thin cheeks, as he wrote,—

"My gipsy ring, to N. B."

"Do you think Lady Rivers would mind it?" he asked, in a low voice.

A lump rose in his throat as she answered,—

"No, dear, Nesta will be pleased, and so will her mother."

Then she put her head down on his pillow, and sobbed as if she would never stop. He let her cry, whilst his own face grew white with exhaustion, and his lips quivered. Then he got his hand—his poor, thin hand—upon her head.

"I don't mind it now. I used to think it was bad to lie still, or to crawl about, when other fellows could run, and row, and play at cricket; but I've got used to it, and—and if anything goes wrong I shan't be leaving you alone, Flo. You've got the best husband that ever was."

"But I'll tell the doctor not to come. He shan't touch you," she gasped. "We can be very, very happy, can't we, dear, even if you are a little lame?"

A sweet smile hovered on his lips. "I haven't thought of you, Flo, as I ought. I was so mad for you to marry Basil, because I thought he was a trump, that I never asked you if you loved him; but you do, dear, don't you?"

"Yes—yes, there's not another man like him. He will take care of us both, and think for us both, and sometimes, perhaps, those wretched mortgages will be paid off, and you will have a sweet young wife of your own."

He shook his head.

"I shan't marry her; but I think she would have liked me if I had tried."

"There could be no objection if you get all right. Lady Rivers has taken a fancy to us both. Oh, darling, be quick and get strong, lest somebody else should carry Nesta off."

"Would the somebody else mind her wearing my ring?" twisting it round on his finger.

It was so large for it now that he could scarcely keep it on.

"You will have to ask her, and there mayn't be a somebody else at all. Now you must keep quite still, and I'll read to you."

He leant his head back on the pillows, and his eyes closed. Flora went on reading for a little while in her sweet, soft voice, and then she stopped, her eyes resting with fond affection on his face.

It seemed to her that it had grown smaller since yesterday; but, of course, that must be her fancy. It was very white, but he missed the fresh air of the country, and evidently London did not agree with him. They would take him back as soon as ever they could.

"The doctors will be here at twelve to-morrow," Sir Basil announced, when he came home. "Do you really think your brother can stand it?"

"I don't know. This afternoon I almost thought—"

She stopped, unwilling to frame her thoughts in words, but he guessed what she meant.

"Well, we must leave it till to-morrow," he said, cheerfully, "and then they will be the best judges. But I'll take care to warn them



[FLORA WENT ON READING IN HER SWEET, SOFT, VOICE—THE BEST OF ALL NURSES.]

that we mean to run no risks. I don't think London suits you any better than Eustace."

"I shall be all right when this constant anxiety is over. Do you know when the Rivers are coming up to town?"

"I saw their shutters were unclosed to-day, so, I suppose, they are back already. Are you anxious for their society?"

"I wanted to ask Nesta to five o'clock tea."

"Ah! poor little thing. I fancied she was rather smitten with Eustace. Ask her, by all means, only wait till to-morrow is over."

"Oh! yes; I'll wait till Eustace is well. It would be no use if he couldn't see her."

"Ah! you little match-maker, I thought there was some hidden motive behind the scenes. You are growing as Machiavellian as Philip."

"Have you seen him to-day?"

"Yes," with a sigh; "he always finds me out when he is in want of me. If he would only stick to his profession instead of poking his nose into everybody else's business it would be much better for all of us. You will sing to me, won't you? Your voice always sends the cobwebs away."

"Now, before dinner?" she asked, in surprise.

"Yes. You'll be running up after dinner to see that boy. 'A bird in the hand,' you know."

She sat down to the piano, played a few chords, then sang a song, which was sweet and sad, and seemed in accord with her own feelings.

Sir Basil sat in a chair close to the piano, but he put up his hand to shield his eyes from the light, and she could not see the expression of his face. It was grave and sad as death.

When she finished he asked for another, in a tired voice, and she sang on, song after song, the lights on the piano being the only light in the large twilight room, her voice the only sound in the stillness.

The stillness and the surrounding shadows

weighed down her spirits, and she broke off with a shudder.

"The fire must be out, I'm sure. I feel so cold."

She ran to the fireplace, took up the poker, and hammered at the coals, but no responsive flame came from them.

Sir Basil took the poker from her hand, and laughed at her ineffective efforts.

"Let me try," he said, grandly, but he poked without any effect, for the fire was out. Then he remarked that he was very sorry he had forgotten all about it, and rang the bell for it to be lighted whilst they dressed for dinner.

On their way upstairs they looked into Eustace's dressing-room.

There was a shaded lamp on the table, and the fire was burning brightly, sending cheerful rays against the steels.

Flora stepped on tiptoe to the side of the sofa, and then she looked round and beckoned to her husband.

"You see he is fast asleep. He has been just like that for two hours," she said, in a whisper. "The long rest must be good for him."

Sir Basil did not answer, only stooped his head lower, and touched the boy's white cheek with his hand.

"Oh, don't!" whispered Flora. "You'll wake him."

"My darling, can't you see?"

He said no more, but put his arm round her, and drew her to his side. Then she began to tremble from head to foot.

"Oh, no, no! He'll wake soon."

"He'll wake in a happier land, where the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain," he said, brokenly.

She gave a cry like a wounded animal, and flung herself down on her knees.

"Oh, Heaven! oh, Heaven! don't let him die! I can't do without him—I can't!"

Sir Basil looked down at her very pitifully

with unshed tears in his own eyes. He might have thought that his own love would have been enough for her; but there was no bitter jealousy—only infinite tenderness and infinite sympathy in the depths of his heart.

He let her grief have its course, let the broken-hearted sister weep over her only brother; and then he raised her half-fainting in his arms, and carried her like a child across the landing into her room.

There he laid her down on the bed, and sat by her side, and held her hand, knowing that no words of his would do her any good as yet, that time alone could help her to bear the burden which Heaven had sent her.

Thus, the very day before the cripple was to be cured by the skill of man, Eustace Trevanion was taken to a better land, where no crutches are needed, for the halt are no longer lame; where no doctors are wanted, because there is no sickness and no pain.

(To be continued.)

PARLOUR MUSIC PLAYING.—Much is said about the difference between pianoforte and organ touch, but it is a fact beyond question that the more the former partakes of the nature of the latter the better it is, as it will in that case be more like a pressure than a blow. As a general thing each finger should, however, be raised higher in pianoforte than in organ playing, in order better to prepare for the desired tone quality before the contact with the key by a certain mental and physical balancing of the finger, and for which there is no necessity in organ playing, as all tone colouring on that instrument is produced by the change of stops and not by the quality of touch. There should also be in the pianoforte touch more of that "clinging" pressure while the key is held down, at least in "cantabile" phrases, so as to prevent as far as possible the weakening of the tone before the entrance of the next note.



["DO YOU WISH TO BE TOLD YOUR COMPANY IS APPRECIATED BY AT LEAST ONE HERE?" SAID ADELE.]

NOVELETTE.]

BROWNIE.

CHAPTER I.

VERA CARSTAIRS'S FIRST RIDE.

"I wish I could ride," said Vera Carstairs, with a half-dissatisfied frown on her pretty face as she stood at the open window of the breakfast-room at the Rectory watching several equestrians sweeping along the wide hedge-bordered road that ran at the end of the garden. "Papa," she added, resting one firm, well-shaped hand on the window-sill, and turning her head slightly, "papa, why is it that you never had me taught? Agnes rides splendidly now; she told me so in her last letter!"

"My dear Miss Vera, why have you not expressed that wish before? Every horse in my stable is at your service," said a cool, clear, manly voice, which made the girl start and blush vividly.

"Where did you spring from?" she asked, recovering herself in a moment, and smiling out at the tall, well-built, handsome-faced man who stood before her.

He did not make any reply for the moment, but stood gazing at the pretty picture the girl made in her simple holland gown, her curly brown hair falling carelessly about her graceful shoulders, her brown eyes bright and sparkling with health. A pretty picture, indeed; and the roses that crept all around the wide window making a sweet and fitting frame to that fair girl's face, were not purer in tint and delicacy than the rare pink glow on the rounded cheeks.

"Lost your tongue, Mr. Clive Norton?" she went on, seeing that he did not answer, and not a whit disconcerted by his close scrutiny. She had known the Nortons all her life; and though they were the grand people of Marlbury,

and she only the younger daughter of the underpaid, overworked Vicar; yet she never could, and never, in all probability, would feel that she must bow low to them, and, to do them justice, they never showed any desire that she should do so.

"No," he returned, half lazily, but with a laugh. "I was lost in admiration of your sweet self. But you have not accepted my offer. Shall I bring a mare over with me this afternoon?"

"But I do not even know how to get up," was the dismayed response; "besides, who is to teach me? Besides, papa has a horse and—I do not think he would like me to accept, so do not say any more about it. And Vera turned her head that he should not see the tears that had risen to her eyes; for, oh! she had so longed all her life to have a horse to ride on, to feel herself flying, as she had seen the Norton girls, over meadows, leaping ditches, and cantering down the wide, cool shady lanes that abounded in dear old Marlbury.

"Besides, besides, how many more besides?" inquired Clive Norton, with a light laugh. "If you can rummage up a habit the rest is all plain sailing."

"What is all this earnest talking about?" asked the gentle, kindly voice of the Vicar at his daughter's elbow; and Vera turned, and twining her supple fingers round his arm laid her head coaxingly on his breast. "What was that I heard about habits and horses, eh, pussie?"

"Oh, papa, Mr. Norton says he will teach me to ride if I can find a habit, and I know where there is one—an old one of dear mamma's. Do let me, papa! I will be so careful!" and the arms crept up round the father's neck till the white head was bent over the bright brown one.

At the mention of the dead wife's name a slight cloud of pain overspread the grave, sensitive features; but the loving father put

aside his own feelings, and smiling down at the child who had never seen its mother's face, he returned,—

"You may learn to ride as soon as you like, but Lister is a sorry hack for a lady to ride. If I had known of your wish, pet, you should have—"

"Now, papa, if you look like that I shall be sorry that I have made my desire known at all. But Mr. Norton says he will bring one of his own horses over for me; won't that be grand, papa?" and a merry ripple of delight fell from the girl's lips.

"You are very good, young sir," said Mr. Carstairs, with grave, old-fashioned courtesy, "but will Lady Norton and Sir William like it?"

"And why not, pray, Mr. Carstairs?" was the ready retort, though the remark caused a sensation of doubt to flash across his brain. "Well, that is settled then. Shall it be three o'clock?" he added, looking inquiringly at Vera.

"Three o'clock," she assented, with a nod. "By-the-by, what brought you over here so early? I was so full of myself I forgot that you did not come to listen to my complainings."

"I came to get out of the way of a regular inroad of visitors, both male and female. You ought to have seen me sneaking round the back of the house, keeping well under the shade of the hedges!" was the laughing rejoinder.

"Don't you think it would be as well if you came in?" observed Vera.

"If you will let me come in through the window," and without waiting for a reply he vaulted lightly into the pleasant, but shabby room. It was quite evident that this was not an unusual proceeding from the half-reproving, yet amused glance of father and daughter.

"Now, Mr. Clive, if you have visitors, how are you going to keep your appointment with

me?" asked Vera, taking a seat on the substantial arm of the Vicar's easy chair.

"Don't you see I can plead a prior engagement?" he said quaintly, and Vera laughed outright. "It is all very well for you to laugh," he went on, half grumblingly, "but one of those visitors is destined to be the future Lady Norton, and I have never seen her since she wore short frocks and pinafores."

"Poor boy, is it going to be forced into a loveless marriage?" teased Vera; then, with a sudden change of manner and tone, "You must be an idiot, then, and I am sorry for you. Why not steer clear of love and marriage? I mean to!"

"Your remarks are highly complimentary," said Clive, piqued at her snappers; "and so far from never loving, I've heard lots of girls talk like that, and they always get the fever worse than the others; and, by Jove, I think you'll get it bad when you do get it."

"Indeed? Well, I think so too, so as that is the case I mean to keep out of love's way," said Vera, tapping her toes on the shabby carpet that once boasted a pattern, to judge by the odd scraps of raised print and yellowed drab in corners where the chairs and side tables stood. "You must excuse me now, as I have some soup to get ready for old Widow Brown and papa's luncheon, and, oh! heaps of things to see to," and without more ceremony Vera trotted away, leaving the Vicar and young Clive Norton alone.

"I am selfish enough to hope that she will keep out of love's way for some time to come," observed the Vicar, looking up from his paper and smiling on the young fellow before him. "She is so young—a mere child yet."

"Yes," answered Clive, his blue eyes lighting up with amusement. "She was having a swing the other day when I called. By-the-by, Mr. Carstairs, what do you think of the new doctor? I have not seen him yet, but I hear he is a splendid-looking fellow."

"Neither have I seen him, but I intend calling this afternoon, after which you shall have my verdict," replied the Rev. Mr. Carstairs. "And now, young sir, you must excuse me," he went on, rising and holding out his hand. "I see my old oob at the gate," and with a nod he passed out of the room, Clive following at a leisurely pace.

He could hear Vera's voice trilling snatches of song softly as she passed to and from the kitchen and garden; could see the flash of her dress now and again from where he stood; and once he caught a glimpse of the sweet unconscious face bent over a small bed of fragrant herbs.

"A mere child!" he mused, watching the graceful movements of the slender, supple figure, and a strange feeling of longing and yearning came into his heart. "Yes, but only in thought, and when once the woman's soul is awakened what a depth of passion will be found there? Vera Carstairs," he called aloud, "I am going now. Good-bye till this afternoon."

"You need not have troubled to wait," cried Vera from the garden, "I will be all ready at three. Good-bye!" and then she returned to her labours of gathering herbs for Widow Brown's soup; and Clive Norton had nothing to do but to saunter out into the sunlit quaint old garden and pursue his homeward way.

At three o'clock precisely Vera stood at the window of her bedroom, which overlooked the front garden, ready equipped for her ride. The habit fitted to perfection, though it was a trifle old-fashioned in cut and decidedly shabby; but the fair, fresh, girlish face looked fairer than ever with that bright colour born of excitement on the rounded cheeks, that quick glance of delight in the large brown eyes. So thought Clive, as he came quickly up the pathway with its border of close-clipped box; and another thought came unbidden to his mind—"would be passing sweet to have those brown eyes always to welcome him thus, to see them droop beneath his gaze, and then he smiled at the notion.

What would his lady mother say to such a match? A Norton, the head of the family, or rather the only son, to wed the penniless daughter of a penniless person! Besides, Vera Carstairs was a child—a mere child of eighteen!

"Here I am!" he cried cheerily, as the girl bent out of the window, her face dimpling all over with pleasure. "Are you ready?"

"Been ready this half-hour," was the smiling retort; and then she disappeared, only to reappear a few moments later under the trellised porch. "Papa," she called, opening a door that faced the breakfast-parlour, "come and see me start. That horse looks a good way up in the world. How ever am I to get up?"

"Oh, easily enough," was the careless rejoinder. "You just do as I tell you, and you will have no bother."

The three—Mr. Carstairs having joined them—had arrived at the gate by this time, where stood the two horses under the cool, pleasant shade of the widespread chestnuts that screened the garden from the gaze of passers-by.

"What a little beauty!" exclaimed Vera, as she caught a fuller view of the graceful bay that Clive had brought for her—a slender, glossy-shinned creature, with a small proud head and arched neck, perfect in every particular.

"You are was first in the Goodwood races last year," said Clive, passing his hand caressingly over the smooth skin. "Now, Miss Vera!"

After several ineffectual attempts Vera mounted half-way where she stuck fast, declaring she would have to try again; but Clive would not hear of that, and so she had to scramble the rest of the way, and at last found herself seated in triumph. They went down the lane slowly, Vera in high glee, and Clive giving instructions as to how she should sit, &c., and the old Rector gazed lovingly after them, never dreaming that a world of untold shame and sorrow would come to his child through Clive Norton. Well, indeed, that he knew not the future; he could not then have gone back so quietly to his study to finish his sermon.

Half-way down the lane Clive drew rein and asked Vera which route she would prefer—the open road, or the quiet country lanes that abounded in this lovely part of Kent—lanes that partook of the nature of roads, where wide ditches, filled with wild flowers, bordered them, and high hedges, white with briony, made a sort of break in the vast stretches of green.

Vera chose the lanes, feeling shy in this her first appearance on any horse; and then they went on, she prattling away to her heart's content, and he listening in quiet amusement.

Clive Norton was four-and-twenty, and considered himself a kind of elder brother to Vera, who had never been blessed with any of her own; and looking upon Vera as a pretty, innocent child, he never dreamed of danger to himself arising from these rides in the soft hush of the summer noons.

"What kind of horsewoman do you think I shall make?" asked Vera, looking round at Clive as they turned the corner of a lane which gave on to a broad, white road.

Neither had noticed a party of riders coming at a swift canter towards them, and therefore both were startled when a clear, high-bred voice called out,—

"Ah, Mr. Clive! so you have turned riding-master?"

Clive flushed slightly, then laughed, but it was an uneasy laugh, for he was wondering what one of the party would think of his refusal to join them, as he had a prior engagement. This one was a tall, majestic-looking girl, or woman, with a pale, haughty, dark-eyed face, and as Vera met the cold glance of those eyes a chill went through her.

Something in that glance made her think the owner could be cruel, and she inwardly

prayed that she might never be an object of anger to this girl with the repellent, lovely face.

The Misses Norton greeted Vera cordially. There was as good blood in the veins of Vera Carstairs as in their own, and the girls being "nice" girls, always made a point of speaking to her, though their father and mother did not approve of the familiarity; it gave people notions above their position!

"You do not know Vera," said Adah, the eldest, turning to the dark-eyed girl with a smile. "Miss Carstairs, Miss Bertram, Miss Bertram, Miss Vera Carstairs."

Adah Bertram acknowledged the introduction by a cold inclination of her dark head only, and then addressing Clive said, in a cool, clear, cold voice,—

"We will bid you adieu now, Mr. Norton, this is if it is agreeable," and she glanced inquiringly at the others.

"Oh, yes!" cried Alice Norton, a bright-faced, brown-eyed girl of about eighteen. "I am dying for another center. Good-bye, Vera!"

Miss Bertram smiled at Clive, a smile that utterly altered her whole face, rendering it perfect in its beauty; then, as she bowed to Vera, the cold hauteur chased away the smile, and Vera shuddered. She gave a deep sigh of relief as the party rode swiftly away, and looking curiously up into Clive's face, asked,—

"Who is that girl, Miss Bertram?"

"That is my bride-elect," returned Clive, and there was a ring of pride in his tones.

Adah Bertram was a woman whom any man would be proud to see at the head of his table; whether she was a woman to command and love—the all-abiding, tender love necessary to perfect wedded life—was a question he had not asked himself as yet.

"Oh!" That was all Vera said. But if he had not been busy with his own thoughts he would have read the opinion she had formed in that monosyllable. "I think we had better be going home," she went on, after a few moments; "papa will be wanting his tea."

"Very well, I am your most obedient slave," returned Clive, laughing.

"Well, my pet, and how have you enjoyed your first ride?" inquired the Rev. Mr. Carstairs, coming out into the porch on hearing their footsteps on the pathway.

"So much, papa," she cried, merrily. "I did not go more than half a yard up in the air when I cantered; did I, Mr. Clive?"

"I assure you Miss Vera speaks truth," he responded, gravely, at which they all laughed. "I must say good-bye, as there is a dinner on up at the Tower, and I must be there, of course," he added, shaking hands with the Vicar and then with Vera. "I shall bring the horse round to-morrow at the same time, so be ready," and then he turned away.

CHAPTER II.

NEIL ST. CROIX, THE NEW DOCTOR.

THE Bookery was as sweet an old house as one could wish to see, nestling like a fair white bird among tall, dark elms, and covered, all save the roof, by luxuriant vines. A long, narrow stretch of lawn, smooth as velvet, with a straight yellow path on one side, led up to its windows where fragrant mignonette sent out its breath to mingle with the other pleasant odours of the summer air.

Dr. Neil St. Croix, sitting in his snug study busily writing, looked as if life had gone well with him. The close-cropped, dark head had a well-satisfied carriage, and the firm, rather large mouth, ornamented but not hidden by the soft, dark moustache, wore a pleasant, easy smile.

Presently he put down his pen and looked out of the window which, the room being at the rear of the house, commanded an extensive view of the surrounding country, and thus discovered a pair of keen, hazel eyes that

had the look of a man accustomed to take in a world of information at a glance—a man quick of perception, proud and determined, proud to a fault, determined with an unwavering determination, yet with a wealth of tenderness lurking somewhere about the face, whether in the eyes or the lines of the mouth was not certain, but it was there—in the face somewhere.

The Rookery was situated in the main street of Marlbury, a street that commenced at the foot of a steep hill, and ended on its brow, and the Rookery lay half-way up the incline.

When Neil St. Croix glanced up from his writing, he had no other purpose than to relieve his eyes from the monotony of staring at the paper, but as he was about to continue his occupation, a loud ring made him pause; and, next moment, he was startled by the apparition of a young girl, in a state of terrified excitement.

Vera, for it was she, had been out for a ride, and, on returning, found her father in his study, apparently asleep; but when, on laying her hand on his arm, there was no movement, she felt a vague alarm thrill her, and, raising the white head, found, to her horror, that he had either fainted or had a fit.

It was the work of a moment to mount Brownie, and, Dr. St. Croix being the nearest doctor, ride madly to his house.

"Will you come quickly to the Vicarage, please, Dr. St. Croix? Papa is in a fit or something!" she cried, hurriedly; and Neil, who had risen on her entrance, bowed acquiescence.

"I will be there almost as soon as yourself," he returned, quietly; and, somehow, Vera felt reassured by those grave tones.

She had never before spoken with Neil; though, since his advent in Marlbury, they had often met, and he and her father had become great friends.

He was true to his word. She hardly had time to change her habit before she heard his voice in the hall, and, running hastily down, she led him to her father's room, where he lay, still and motionless, as she had first found him.

Neil St. Croix gave a quick, pitying glance at Vera as he entered, and saw that still, white-haired form, but the girl heeded nothing in her pain and horror.

"Tell me, doctor, what is the matter? Is he dead?" she whispered, in an awestruck voice, and her pretty face blanched and quivered at the mere thought.

"No," he replied, calmly, "he is in a fit. Who can I give orders to?" he added, looking round at the old woman, who had been maid and nurse to his two motherless girls.

"I will do all that is to be done," exclaimed Vera, starting forward.

"You are too young," was the quiet reply, given in the tone of a command, and Vera instinctively gave way to him. Then he continued, addressing Anna White, "He must be placed in a warm bath at once, and I will send round my boy with some medicine. He is recovering now."

"Papa," whispered Vera, as the old man's eyelids fluttered, "papa, do you know me?"

"Vera," was the slowly spoken response. "I was taken ill, my child; do not be frightened. I shall soon get all right."

Dr. Neil had left the apartment as soon as he saw that his patient was recovering, but he did not leave the house. He went to the study, where, after writing out a prescription, he spoke gravely to the trusted old servant words that sent the colour from her healthy old cheeks, and made her throw up her hands with a gesture expressive of despair.

"My poor motherless bairn! what will she do?" she said.

"Let us hope that the blow will be warded off for some time," he returned, rising. "Good-bye, nurse; I shall call in again in the evening to have a chat with the Vicar. Yes, he will

be well enough," he added, seeing her look of surprise, and then he went away.

"So I gave you a fright this afternoon, St. Croix?"

It was the Rev. Mr. Carstairs who spoke; and in the same cheery tones of yore; and Vera, who had risen on his entrance, looked up brightly into Neil's face.

"It is all your medicine, doctor!" she said, in girlish enthusiasm.

"And your father's good constitution," he replied.

And then the Vicar rang for more tea, for the things still stood on the table, and invited Neil to be seated.

"Have you leisure enough to stay a little and have a good talk?" asked the Vicar.

"Yes, if you like the infliction of my company. I can stay the evening," was the ready response.

He watched the graceful, girlish figure, as Vera bent over the table preparing his meal, and unconsciously the thought came to him that this girl, with her bright winsome face and perfectly unaffected manner, would make a man's home very homelike; and he began to think that the life of a man like himself was not all that could be desired, that if he had a wife to welcome him when he came in tired from his round of visits in the evening it would be very sweet.

Not that Neil St. Croix had fallen in love at first sight, only the scene of peaceful home comfort they presented, this old man and his young daughter, brought up the vision of his evenings spent in solitude, and it made him think thoughts that were the beginning of falling in love.

After the table had been cleared they drew their chairs near the window, where they could see the white moonlight resting on the fair landscape, and bathing the rustling trees in silvery light. That to sit with the father and daughter in the moonlight was the commencement of a new era in Neil St. Croix's life; and when he rose to bid them good-night, an unspoken wish was in his heart that the Vicar would permit him often to make unceremonious visits.

Neil St. Croix had been so long in the world of fashion that he had sickened of the frivolity and shallowness of most of its votaries, and the simplicity and refinement of this Vicar's daughter came upon him like a revelation. He had admired the natural and sensible manner in which she had given her answers when appealed to in the course of conversation; and as he strolled home down the silent moonlit lane he found himself wondering how those clear brown eyes would look with the love-light in them; and Vera Carstairs went to bed, and dreamed of a dark, rather stern-faced man, whose voice had such a soothing in its grave tones.

CHAPTER III.

ADELE BERTRAM MAKES A MOVE.

UP at Norton Towers there was great gaiety going on. One of the chief things, supposed to be more fashionable and select than balls, was a musical evening once a week, and Dr. St. Croix, being a splendid musician, always made one of the assemblage. He had been in Marlbury nearly two months, and during that time had paid many visits to the Vicarage; and slowly but surely he was placing Vera on the throne of his heart, and it pained him not a little to find that she was not seen oftener at the house of his noble friends.

Still he enjoyed those evenings in the long-drawing-room, with its pale, cream-hued furniture, and jardinières and vases of bright, rare blossoms, listening to and joining in with the conversation of these perfectly-cultured people. Though he admired Vera's simplicity, "fashion" still had its charm.

It was an evening in August—early August—when the air is soft and wooing, and laden with the odour of all sweet flowers; and as

Neil sauntered along through the green corn-fields on his way to Norton Towers there was an air of satisfaction about him that seemed to indicate that the world was as kind as ever to this young doctor.

These corn-fields led up to the grounds of Norton Towers, and soon Neil had crossed the stile which was the boundary line, and entered the garden in front of the house. Gay voices rang out on the still evening air; and through the wide-open French windows he could see a number of people, either standing or sitting. It was that half-hour before dinner in which every one gets very pleasant and affable in anticipation.

Adele Bertram, who had been conversing with Clive Norton, turned with a charming smile to the young doctor, saying,—

"You are the very last, Dr. St. Croix! You good musicians always like to keep people in suspense."

"Say rather, we do not like to bore people with our company, when he know it is only what we perform that calls forth an invitation," he retorted, sarcastically.

"Now, doctor, I think you are very unkind. Do you wish to be told your company is appreciated at least by one here?" she replied, with a quick flash of her black eyes.

There was no mistaking her meaning; and yet her marriage with Clive Norton was the talk of the village, for it was fixed to take place in September.

Neil St. Croix had not the key of her mind therefore he had to take refuge in small talk.

"I was down at the Vicarage last evening," he said, carelessly. "Jolly old fellow, but he cannot live long. I am sorry for Miss Carstairs. It will be an awful blow to her."

"Poor girl!" murmured the cold, clear voice of Adele. "You are a great admirer of hers, I hear. It is a pity she is such an arrant flirt. It would be so nice for her to get married to some kind, thoughtful man, who would—"

"You must pardon me, Miss Bertram, but I always thought Miss Carstairs a good, thoughtful girl, who would be calculated to turn a man to be good and useful, who otherwise would only be a frivolous butterfly," replied Neil, gravely, and with a closing of the firm mouth.

"Oh! I did not know you were so very interested in Vera Carstairs, Dr. St. Croix; but everyone here knows she loved and still loves Clive, while he only cares for her as a brother. See how the silly moth flutters round the candle—those rides, for instance!"

"He is like a brother to her, Miss Bertram," insisted Neil, a slight flush rising to his face.

"You would wish to think so, I see," was the meaning answer, spoken with a smile, though the dark eyes flashed dangerously.

Neil did not deny the accusation contained in the words, only bowed and moved away as the dinner-bell clanged out, and Clive came to lead his fiancée to her place at his side. But though outwardly showing no sign, Neil shrank from those words as a dog does from a blow.

Vera Carstairs a flirt! She is in love with Clive, the acknowledged lover of another girl! No; she might have cared for him—Clive—at first; but something seemed to whisper that Vera was too proud to nurse a love unasked and unwished for. Yet the thought rankled, and he went over so many little things that seemed to point to the fact that Vera had loved Clive. Then how unwise to continue those rides.

He was not in a very pleasant frame of mind after those musings, but he had never played so masterfully, so grandly; and Adele, sitting watching the proud, stern face of the player, smiled, and told herself that she would get her revenge on this girl for daring to monopolise her lover.

"You and the doctor seem to hit it pretty well," remarked Clive, during a pause in the playing, and Adele replied with a sweet smile that,—

"We were talking of Vera Carstairs."

It was late when Neil said good-bye to the Norton Towers people, yet he did not go at once to his pretty home. He, instead, struck across a narrow lane which gave entrance to a wide stretch of corn-fields, the corn lying tall and still in the silence of the moonlit night.

A high, old-fashioned stile rising up across his path made him pause, and he stood still, folding his arms over the rough top bar, and lifting his face to the quiet heavens—so pale and troubled a face, with such a look of deep sorrow in the clear eyes!

"Heaven," he murmured, huskily, "I have learned to love her so in these two short months! Can it be true that she cares for Clive, while I have been fancying, like a big dolt, that her eyes grew shy at my approach?"

It was the first time Neil St. Croix had ever really loved. Like all men, he had had his flirtations and his fancies, but this winsome brown-haired girl, with her frank, maidenly ways, had taken his heart slowly, but surely from him; and now he was told that she already loved, and that she loved one who cared only for her as a sister, while he—

Then, too, if she—his careless, pure-eyed Vera—loved Clive she could not be the pure thing he had imagined her, for did she not know that Clive Norton would soon be the husband of another woman? He could not understand it, could not reconcile the different ideas; and with a half-sigh, half-groan, he turned, and walked back to his home, which of late had become so dear as the future home of Vera Carstairs.

CHAPTER IV.

"I love my love, I love my love,
Because I know my love loves me!"

VERA CARSTAIRS trilled the words out carelessly, unheedingly. Her heart was full of a new sweet melody, and unconsciously it rose to her lips, and found words in that pretty song. Vera knew at last what it was to love, knew the depth of her own soul; and while the strength of the passion she felt for Neil St. Croix startled her, yet it filled her with a shy happiness and wonderment that was very perplexing. She had no mother, no woman to whom she could confide all her hopes and fears; and with a girl's natural timidity she hid all signs from her father, although she loved him so dearly.

It was a lovely day—August is ever a lovely month, but this year he seemed to have borrowed or stolen the warmth of July, and mingled with it the sweet, breezy coolness of August—a lovely day, with the scent of dying roses in the air, the subtle freshness of ripened corn stealing across the meadows, and the tall trees swaying gently to and fro, rocking the merry birds that paused on their boughs to take breath for another flight and long shrill carol.

Vera looked fair and pure indeed as she bent over her flowers; and Neil, standing at the low, white gate leading from the church, told himself that Vera in her innocence might have grown to love Clive Norton, but she would cast it from her as she would a noxious reptile on learning that he cared for another. He did not see her blush as she glanced up, and did not know that she had seen him, and that the song died on her lips in shy fear that he would guess; he only saw her lift her face, rosy red, as Clive Norton sauntered down the pathway, and a sickening horror and pain took possession of him.

"Gardening!" was the very commonplace remark that Clive made, but Neil did not hear; he only saw that lovely, blushing face turned to that of Clive Norton. Then Clive caught sight of Neil, and called out,—

"Don't stand there as if you were intruding. We are not making love. I am booked, and out of the hunt; so come in, old fellow."

"How condescending! May he really come in?" laughed Vera, blushing more furiously than ever at Clive's words, and not daring to raise her eyes to Neil's.

Ah! Vera, you little know the world of pain and passion in the eyes that are gazing down so straightly at you!

Clive saw the look, and wondered; but he made some light remark upon her gardening, and then said,—

"Will you come for a ride this afternoon? It will be the last before I am married."

Neil, with the poison of Adele's look and innuendoes ranking in his brain, laid a deep meaning to those words, and to Vera's quick look of pleasure.

"Yes," she replied, briskly, "as if there could be any other answer." Then looking up shyly into the young doctor's face she added, "Did you wish to see papa? He is out now, but he told me to ask you to step in this evening, if you should call."

"I will come over this evening, Miss Carstairs," he responded, coldly, as he turned away.

In his pain and disappointment he did not notice that he had not shaken hands, but the omission sent a cold chill to Vera's heart, and the sweet, smiling mouth quivered. She would not let Clive see that she was hurt; and so, turning abruptly so that her face was hid, she said,—

"You know my habits, Mr. Norton, and will therefore excuse me if I go in now," and he laughed, and said,—

"Of course," and sauntered away.

He wondered what made her so quiet and pale that afternoon as they cantered along the straight country roads, and once asked Vera if she had received any bad news.

"You are so quiet and changed," he said, in explanation. "Is there anything that I could help you in?"

"Nothing. No one can help me," she returned slowly, lifting her eyes to his face, and something in their glance told Clive that the love she had sworn to eschew had come to her, and with the knowledge came a great pity, for he guessed that she was not happy in her love. He did not guess that he was the cause of her unhappiness, did not know that, as he bent towards her in quick sympathy, that Neil St. Croix, driving along the road in his neat brongham, caught a full view of them both, at sight of whom the blood forsook the dark cheeks, and seemed to take refuge in the dark eyes.

"Their last ride before the wedding!" muttered Neil. "Does the fellow see and know that she loves him?" and then they were lost to view.

When Neil entered the little sitting-room that evening Vera was alone. She had recognised his voice—aye, his footsteps—and a sudden shyness overwhelmed her at the thought of receiving him alone, and she rose, and began to nervously rearrange the flowers that stood on a side table.

"Is that you, doctor?" she asked, coming forward and holding out her hand.

As he took and held it, gazing down at the fair girlish face, a tide of passionate love swept over him, and words of passionate tenderness quivered on his lips, but he held them back. The girl whom he had learned to idolise had no love for him; her heart was given to Clive Norton, or at least had been. He must wait, and perhaps the future years—with a start he remembered that it was not *de rigueur* to stand with a young lady's hand in his while he indulged in dreams, and dropping the slender hand abruptly, he said with a short laugh,—

"Yes, Miss Carstairs, it is I. Do you know that you are a perfect study in brown this evening? Brown hair, eyes and frock?"

"Frock!" echoed Vera, trying to hide her feelings in banter; and just then Mr. Carstairs came in looking feebler, but just as bright and cheerful as of yore, and Vera settled herself in a low chair with a book, but not to read; her mind was in a whirl of painful wonder. Why did Neil look at her with that passionate, loving gaze, and then turn so abruptly from her? Something told her that he loved her, and in the midst of her pain her young heart

throbbed with joy at the thought; but why could he not tell his love? Why look so unutterably sad whenever he looked upon her?

"Now, Vera," said the Vicar, turning to his daughter, after a little conversation with the young doctor, "give us some music; sing 'Thy voice is near me in my dreams.'"

Vera would sing in the presence of Clive Norton without being asked, but to go to that little piano and sing with Neil's dark eyes fixed upon her, she felt almost giddy from nervousness as she rose and crossed the room; but once seated, the nervousness left her, and striking the notes with light, firm touch, she played the opening bars, and then plunged into the song.

As is generally the case, Vera had never sung better; and Neil, watching that speaking face, wondered if it were Clive's voice that haunted her, when, as he was turning the pages of her music, she glanced involuntarily up into his face; and the look he saw there in that fleeting moment sent a thrill of joy to his heart, and in that moment he felt that he was loved. She dropped her eyes as suddenly as she had lifted them, her own heart beating wildly at the love she saw written in Neil's eyes.

She sang again, choosing in the exultation of that moment, "I love my love, because I know my love loves me," sang it with such a passion of tenderness that the simple song took a deeper, sweeter meaning; and Neil's heart answered the words, "Because I know my love loves me," while his handsome face grew soft and dreamy, the dark piercing eyes gentle and misty. Ah! love, love! Why do you carry so bitter a draught for your pupils to quaff?

The moon was up that night, and the Vicar proposed that they should all walk to the doctor's house, and see him safe home. Very different were now his thoughts as Neil walked along the narrow hedge-bordered lanes, with Vera at his side. The girl's face looked very lovely with that sweet womanly expression upon it; Neil saw the new loveliness by the light of the moon, and he raised his head in the stillness, softly breathing a thanksgiving.

No one spoke. In the hearts of two there was the hush of a deep, passionate love that waited to be expressed; and the old man's thoughts had gone back to a night—long, long ago—when he and his gentle girl-wife had so walked in the soft white light of the moon—their last walk together. Vera drew a deep, long breath as they turned into the side street, at the corner of which stood Neil St. Croix's home. It seemed to her that with the end of that walk there came an end to this great sweetness that had entered her life. Neil saw the pretty lips draw together with quick pain; and, divining some of her thoughts, wished that he could have but one moment wherein to breathe his love. But he could wait, his hour had come sooner than he had hoped; surely he could be patient now! Only a few hours more, and he would know his fate!

Adele Bertram, driving home from a ball saw, from her carriage window, the good-night between the young doctor and the clergyman's daughter; saw their tale of deep, true love written on their quiet, hushed faces, and vowed in her cruel, jealous heart that it should not be. To do her justice, she half believed that Clive cared for Vera, though she knew Vera cared nought for him; but for this very reason she hated her more; and next day, two days before her wedding, she sent Clive to ask Neil St. Croix to pay the Towers a visit, intending to make her second move, since the first had failed.

Vera was to be there also. Poor Vera, you little guessed that you were in the enemy's camp! Neil St. Croix did not arrive until after dinner, when the ladies were grouping themselves in graceful *à-la-littes* and trios, as though they were not longing or the advent of the gentlemen. Adele was the first to notice his entrance, and drew her long crimson silk train aside in smiling invitation, and he went to her side.

She lifted those wondrous, fascinating eyes to his face as he bent over her; and Vera, turning at that moment, felt as though a knife had been thrust through her bosom. Was he a flirt? Could he look like he had looked last night upon any woman? He did not appear to have noticed her standing at a window at the far end of the room; but he had seen her and was longing to go her, to see her eyes light up with the glow he had seen in them the night before, to hear the clear, girlish voice greet him; but Adele was a woman of the world, and having made a plan knew how to carry it out.

She watched Clive's face as he entered the room, and that ugly, cold glitter came into her eyes as she saw him glance round, and then go to where Vera stood; but she smiled and looked up at Neil, saying softly,—

"He is very kind to her and tries to show her that he cares for her as a brother."

"I think she does not need any showing," he returned, coldly.

Later on Clive made his way to his bride elect's side, bending his handsome curly head to whisper,—

"Adele, I have been wanting a few words with my love ever so long, and I thought you would never be alone, dearest."

She glanced up quickly into his face, her own lighting with passionate joy at his tone, then she said, in a bitter voice,—

"You seemed very earnestly and pleasantly engaged with Vera Carstairs."

Clive flushed, not, as she fancied, from guilt but anger, and his voice was cold, even stern, as he replied,—

"Surely, Adele, you are not going to be jealous of my little friend Vera? Why, she seems more like a sister to me, more so than my own. I do not approve of jealousy, Adele; it shows want of faith."

"Jealous! and of Vera Carstairs!" cried Adele Bertram, scornfully. "Clive, one would imagine there was cause for you to even think of such a thing! A little country rustic!"

Clive could not resist a smile as he looked over at Vera, who was seated at the piano. Rustic! She looked anything but that. And the idea of stately Adele Bertram being jealous had a spice of amusement in it for him. Ah! Clive, a jealous sweetheart may amuse you, but what of the wife? Can peace and happiness reign where faith is absent?

"Adele, come out on to the verandah, and do not make yourself so silly. Vera belongs to as good a family as the Nortons; and as to being rustic, in my opinion she shows to great advantage beside those Cross girls, who have seen two seasons in London," remarked Clive, putting out his hand and opening the French window; and Adele followed, her bosom one tumult of jealous rage.

Adele Bertram was one of those women who think that it is a lover's duty to ignore all other women; never to smile upon any woman save themselves; never to show any interest in another woman, be she friend, mother, or sister. She would have been jealous of a man had he shown any great preference for one above the rest of his acquaintance; therefore her feelings on finding him so much attached to a girl-friend may be imagined, and then he had gone out riding with Vera on the very day of her arrival! She would never pardon that—never!

"Have you anything particular to tell me?" she asked, coldly, when they were alone.

"Adele, are you going to show temper so soon before our marriage? What have I done that you should treat me so coldly?" was his reproachful answer.

"I am not showing temper, Clive. I am hurt at the way in which you neglect me for Vera Carstairs," she said, this time in a low gentle voice; and Clive drew her to him, inwardly chafing at her uncalled-for jealousy, yet pleased at the love she evinced for him.

"Vera would laugh if she knew the tumult of doubt she had raised in my queen's breast," he said, laughingly.

"You would never dare!"

Clive's face paled, for Adele had flung herself out of his arms and stood before him, her dark eyes gleaming like fire, her face pale and working. Something was wrong with her to-night, he told himself, with a sinking pain at his heart. He loved this woman, loved her deeply; but the strange temper she had shown on more than one occasion had startled him, and now he turned towards the house, saying moodily,—

"We had better go in. I think Neil is going to play."

And they went in, Adele with a greater pain at her heart than Clive, for she loved him dearly, and felt sorry for her outburst directly it was over; but her pride and silly jealousy held her back.

She made her way over to where Vera sat in a corner listening with rapt face and parted lips to Neil St. Croix's playing. It seemed to her that he was playing to her—first pleading softly, then passionately, then the notes gave out a joyous triumphant burst that paled her fair face.

Was it thus he loved her? Would his soul sing such a triumphant song as that when he knew she loved him?

"Oh, Neil, Neil!" cried her heart, "I love you—love you! Let our souls triumph together!"

He looked across the well-lighted room and saw the face of the woman he loved grow passion-pale at the sound of his music. He felt that she understood, and played on—brilliant, joyous snatches that thrilled all there, and Vera listened to their message with dark, misty, love-lit eyes and heaving breast.

He loved her! She knew it now. Oh, could such love as theirs end happily? Could such brightness last? Even as she asked herself the question she met Adele Bertram's eyes, and their glance of scornful pity sent a quiver of pain through her. Adele was sitting next her, and, bending forward, she said, behind her fan,—

"What a pity he is not happy in his marriage; but people say that she is given to drink."

Vera shrank back as though she had been struck. His marriage! Then, he had a wife already! Yet he had looked love into her eyes to-night, and a guilty joy for a moment dimmed all other feeling. He loved her, and from Adele Bertram's words his wife was unworthy. Then the full horror of it all came upon her, and her thoughts seemed to render her an object of contempt. What if his wife were still more unworthy? Did it make her less his wife?

Oh, Heaven! why had he not told them that he was married? Why had he let her love him? And then she remembered how he had been almost rude to her at times—times, she now supposed, when he remembered his wife. Given to drink! Poor Neil!

"I did not know that Dr. St. Croix was a married man; but I suppose he does not care to mention the fact," she observed aloud, and quite calmly.

When a woman first learns the lesson of love she learns also to command herself, and Vera did not show any outward sign of the ruin her hopes had suffered. She felt instinctively that Adele was no friend of hers, and called her self-command to her aid in consequence.

"No, and he would not thank me for speaking of it. I am sure, as he has not told you himself; but I felt that you ought to be warned in time, ere it was too late," was the cold, condescending reply.

"I thank you," retorted Vera, haughtily, and rising from her seat. "Your interest in my welfare is overwhelming, Miss Bertram; but you seem to forget that I have a father who is quite capable of looking after my interest," and, bowing coldly, Vera turned away, leaving Adele chafing with anger at

finding the "little rustic" so fully mistress of herself.

Clive offered to see Vera home, and, as their way lay in the same direction, Neil St. Croix accompanied them. It was a pleasant night, and the three chatted together as those who have been accustomed to mixing in the same circle of society can.

Nothing that interested one was unknown to the other, but both Clive and Neil wondered at the calm, cold gentleness of Vera's manner, and when Neil paused to say good-night at the corner of the street where his house stood she lifted her eyes and gazed pityingly, yet reproachfully, into his.

Those great sad brown eyes of hers haunted him all through the long hours of that night. Why that look of pity? Why that reproachful gentleness?

CHAPTER V.

THE WEDDING.

So bright and fair a morning would surely fill the bride's heart with peaceful, happy thoughts, and yet Adele did not look as though all was peace with her.

Clive was to make her his wife to-day; she would be his and he hers till death did them part. She was happy, and looked it; but ever and anon the memory of her jealousy of Vera would rise up and send a little cloud across her brow, and the old angry feeling would crimson her cheek.

But as she stood before the altar in her white satin and Brussels lace, with her train of bridesmaids behind her and the white-haired clergyman speaking the solemn words of the marriage service before her, all other thoughts fled, save the one that she would be Clive's wife.

A lovely bride, indeed, and well calculated to call up that murmur of admiration as she issued from the church into the golden sunlight that lay upon her dark head, as though pleased to have found an object of such beauty.

The great organ pealed forth the grand "Wedding March," the notes swelling in great triumphant peals up to the roof, and dying far away out through the open windows, over the yellow cornfields, while the birds paused in their song to listen; and Adele's heart swelled in glad joy, chiming in with the tones of the organ, as Clive stooped his head, and whispered,—

"My wife!"

Vera had excused herself from the wedding on account, she said, of a cold. The truth was that she dared not trust herself to meet Neil St. Croix yet, and when he had called at the Vicarage she pleaded a headache to her father, and remained in her own room. She knew that Neil St. Croix would be there, and though she had shown such self-command at the Towers when Adele had probed her wound she dared not meet him again.

When Adele received the note of excuse she smiled coldly, cruelly, to herself. She could use this note to her advantage—and she did. The grandeur of the wedding breakfast, the speeches, etc., have nothing to do with our story, only that when Adele shook hands with Dr. St. Croix at parting she dropped a note, crumpled and soiled, addressed to herself in Vera's handwriting. Mechanically she stooped and picked it up, and in so doing caught sight of his own name.

Perhaps it was not quite the correct thing to do, but a curiosity to know what Vera had to say about herself to Adele Bertram overcame his scruples, and instead of restoring it to its owner he placed the crumpled paper in his own pocket.

He went away very soon after the bride's departure, went straight to his own home, his little study, and seating himself in his snug armchair, where the bright sunlight that had smelt upon the handsome bride of Clive Norton filtered in and lay in patches on the rich red carpet, and lingered about his dark head

as he bent it over the note which had been penned by the woman he loved.

It was in the postscript that Vera had spoken of him, and these were the words that seemed as if they were written in letters of fire, words that called up a look of bitter pain to his paling cheeks:—

"What you said about Dr. St. Croix's wife shocked me greatly, and I condemn him for having lived so long in our village under false pretences. Perhaps his wife was not wholly to blame."

"She is to be my curse even after death!" he muttered, fiercely, and looking at him then one would no longer wonder at the proud determination of his glance.

He had learned it in a hard school—that of cruel shame and deceit. Yes, Neil St. Croix had his secret—who has not?—the secret of a sister's shame and treachery, from which death had delivered him a year before he had come to Marlbury; and now he had learned to love a pure and innocent girl, this sister, Ada St. Croix, was to be brought as a bar between himself and happiness.

How could he go to Vera Carstairs and tell her that tale of shame, where his own sister had forgotten her purity and gentle birth for the sake of a scoundrel who had left her to die in the gutter, and whom Neil had shuddered until the day of her death? He could not. He must wait for time to smooth away these things; and then he began to wonder why Adele should have taken the pains to tell Vera this falsehood, but as wondering left him where he began he gave it up, and rose, feeling weary for the first time, to prepare for going his rounds.

He understood now why Vera's brown eyes had sought his so reproachfully—why the clear, girlish voice had grown so low and sad that night—for he felt that Vera had learned to care for him at last. Ah! he told himself, truth will out, and she will yet be mine in spite of all obstacles.

A month went by and no change occurred in the little village. No change? Yes, one. Vera Carstairs, going her rounds, visiting her father's flock, was noticed to have grown paler, the clear, fresh voice to have lost its careless ring, and the brown eyes to have taken a sombre, yearning glance that pained the hearts of the rough, but honest people to see. No one spoke of this to her father, for he himself was ailing, and they would not trouble him by speaking of the sudden change in his daughter.

Neil St. Croix came often as before to the Vicarage, but there was a something in Vera's manner—a cold, icy barrier placed between herself and him which he could not break through. Her voice was cheerful and welcoming when he came. She entered into their conversations as usual, and even sang for them, but in everything there breathed the words, "We can never be more than mere friends," and he grew faint, sick with suspense and "love and longing."

Then came news that the Nortons were nearing home, and great preparations were commenced for the reception of the bride; and during the week preceding their arrival Neil had so much to do that he not once had the found his way to the Vicarage; and Vera, struggling with her love and her duty, pined and drooped like a fading lily at his absence.

"Hark! Vera, there goes the bells to welcome home Clive and his young bride. I wish I had felt strong enough to be at the Towers to welcome them."

The Rev. Mr. Carstairs sat in his study, not as usual, by the table, writing, but in his arm-chair, which, despite the mildness of the weather even for the time of year, was drawn up before a blazing fire.

Vera nestled at his feet, looking up yearningly into the dear face of her only parent, the face which seemed to have suddenly grown so old, so jaded and worn. What was the meaning of this weakness in her cheery father? Poor

Vera, you will have need of all your self-command soon!"

"Papa, have you spoken to Dr. St. Croix about yourself?" asked Vera, taking no heed of his words about those at the Towers.

"Yes, dear, and he says I am all right," he responded, cheerily; and then they relapsed into silence, she sitting with her head resting on his knee, one hand clasped in his.

Outside, the sun—the mild, golden, September sun—danced merrily over the tall trees, where the leaves were already taking on their autumn garb, in the hope of seeing it shown up by warm sunlight, that bright rich scarlet and deep russet and gold that makes England's gardens so fair a sight in the early autumn.

And bright shafts of sunlight crept in softly at the open window of the Vicarage study and played quietly among the girl's gold-brown hair, and peeped in among the silvered locks of the old Vicar, while the sweet-toned bells pealed forth their welcome to the young couple in mad, lusty peals.

Vera's thoughts wandered away from the present to the past, and then on to a dream-land future. She did not notice the flight of time nor that the bells were again silent, but sat on there, with her brown head upon her father's knee, her brown eyes gazing into the red heart of the fire. The fire burned down low and dropped with a dull thud, the sun's rays began to slant across the dark carpet, and still those two remained in the same attitude.

Suddenly Vera seemed to become aware of the intense quiet of the room, and she looked round with a shiver, but her father did not move though she laid her hand upon his in rising.

Something in the awful hush of the room and the quiet of that white-haired figure startled the girl, and stooping over him she drew his head forward to the light.

Only one glance was needed to tell her that she was alone. Her father's spirit had gone out while those joy bells were ringing—they had rung his welcome to Heaven!

She did not cry out, the shock was too great; she only felt a cold, hard pain in her bosom, a wild chaos in her brain.

Footsteps sounded on the gravel path outside the study window, but she heeded them not, heeded not that the door was opened and someone entered.

"Great Heaven! Vera, what is this?"

At sound of Clive's voice she raised her head, and the sight of his horror-stricken, living face did what the dead face had failed to do.

Burying her head on the welcome shoulder of her childhood and girlhood friend, Vera Carstairs burst into a flood of passionate tears, Clive stroking the shining hair, and murmuring soothing words as to a little child the while.

Naught save purity was in their thoughts and actions, but the jealous wife—who had followed to see if it were really anxiety about the old Vicar that had made Clive hurry off so soon after his arrival—and who was now gazing in at them with that cold, cruel gleam in her eyes that had startled Vera, put a different construction upon this scene, and hurried away to plan her rival's (?) ruin.

"He may not be dead. Let me go for Dr. St. Croix?" said Clive, after a few moments, and not waiting for her reply he hastened away.

When the two—Dr. St. Croix and Clive Norton—came back, Vera sat in the same attitude in which Clive had left her; sat there as motionless and rigid as the dead Vicar; only on his face peace rested, hers was frozen in a look of horror. She did not seem to notice the young doctor, and when the necessary examination was completed she turned to Clive, saying, piteously,—

"Is he really dead, Mr. Norton?"

"Quite dead, Miss Carstairs. He had heart disease," responded Neil, gravely. "Tell me is there anything I can do?"

"Nothing now. I need no help save that

of Anna," was the quiet, weary reply; and having given a few instructions to the old woman who had entered the room, they took their leave, feeling that Vera was right. She was left alone in this the first hour of her sorrow.

CHAPTER VI.

A FOOLISH STEP.

More than a month had gone by since the death of the old Vicar. Clive often came to the Vicarage to chat and keep up the spirits of his friend Vera; and Neil, who had, or felt he had no excuse, kept away, his heart growing heavier each day as in his rounds he heard "Vera's shameless" conduct discussed, and had not the power to defend her.

Gradually her old friends dropped off, looking another way when she appeared in the village, or when she called, sending messages that they were "not at home," and Vera's heart grew sad and sick. Her father's death had unnerved her, and now the strangely cold manner of those whom she had deemed friends rendered her weak and dispirited to a degree.

"I have only one friend, Clive Norton. He has proved true metal, the others are all false," she told herself, as she stood in the quaint old garden which was sadly neglected of late.

Poor Vera! It was Clive's friendship that had lost her all others, though had she known this in the loyal purity of her heart she would never have treated him with coldness.

The new Vicar was expected soon, and Vera must leave the old home where she had danced as a merry child, where she had learned the pain and bliss of womanhood's love; leave the dear old home which seemed sacred, as being the home of her dear dead father, and seek forgetfulness in fresh scenes and pastures new.

At first she thought of going to her sister Agnes, but put this from her as unsuitable. She would go to her rich, fashionable aunt in London, and if she did not care for her to remain she would go out into the busy world alone, and try in the race to forget the love that had only had its birth to be killed.

Even Dr. St. Croix, when she had met him in the village, was cold and strange in his manner. He would not intrude his love-tale upon her grief, and the self-restraint he laid upon himself gave his speech a coldness he was far from feeling.

As Vera stood in the porch one morning, where the brown, withered stems of the once-lovely rose-vine trailed miserably down the trellis-work, Clive passed, and seeing her slight black-robed figure, paused, calling out,—

"May I come in, Vera?"

"You are always welcome, Mr. Norton," was the gentle reply.

And Clive came up the pathway, and took her hand in his. On the evening when he found her stooping in dumb horror over her dead father, in the moment when, like a child, she laid her head upon his shoulder, came the knowledge that this pure girl was dearer to him than she should be.

He felt that his marriage with Adele Bertram was a mistake—Adele, who, by her wild jealousy, had driven thoughts to his brain that otherwise might have lain dormant. He felt a wild longing to take Vera to his heart, and pour out his tale of misery and love, but he dared not.

She looked so calm, so pure, as she stood before him in her sombre robes and with the pale quiet of sorrow upon her brow, that he could only gaze silently at her. But something in his handsome face startled her—a recklessness that was new to it—and involuntarily she put the question,—

"What is the matter—your wife—?"

"Is quite well, thank you," he interrupted, with a bitter, reckless laugh. "She will drive me mad or into my grave. But do not fear for her. Only a few months married, and I would give ten years of my life to be free!"

"What are you saying, Clive Norton?" exclaimed Vera, in horrified accents.

She had thought Clive at least was happy.

"The truth," he returned, in a half-dogged tone, that told he was deeply hurt.

He did not say how he and Adele had that morning quarrelled bitterly about Vera, how the wife had hurled cruel falsehoods at the husband's head, and how he, the husband, had retorted by informing her that if he could he would be free and marry Vera next day, if she would have him. He only stood and stared moodily over the bare fields after that last reply.

Vera broke the silence by saying that she was going away from Marlbury. This seemed to rouse him, for he threw back his head, as if in defiance, and waited for her to finish.

"You see, the new Vicar will be here next week," she said, "and the people are all so strangely cold to me that I have no inducement to stay on at Marlbury. I go to-night. No one knows I am going, and no one will know where I go, not even yourself."

"Can I not do anything to make the journey less lonely? And oh! Vera, let me give you your old pet, Brownie. No one else shall ride her. She will only rest her head off in the stable," said Clive, earnestly.

"What should I do with her? No, I cannot say yes. You have a wife to ride her," said Vera, gently.

"My wife shall never ride her. She has done all she could to render me wretched. She has driven—"

He paused. It would never do for him to speak to Vera of the scandal about himself and her. The feeling he entertained for her was so pure and true he could not let words that could do no good pass his lips.

His wife he had ceased to love. This girl he dared not love, and he put all disloyal thoughts from him with a firm hand.

"She is your wife," returned Vera, reprovingly, lifting her clear, sinless eyes to his.

"Which, to my sorrow, I know," was the moody response. "It is of no use your talking to me now, Vera. I may in the future learn to forgive when my heart commences its fossilisation and all people are alike, but till then I shall remain abroad."

"Abroad! Are you leaving Marlbury, too, and when?" exclaimed Vera, in astonishment.

"Yes, I am going away. I am not sure when. Perhaps soon—to-night," was the short answer.

"Does your wife consent to this separation?"

Clive laughed, and then catching the sad, hurt glance of Vera's eyes, said,—

"Consent? No. She does not know of my intentions. I merely told her that I might never come back."

They neither of them knew that the cold, dark, revengeful eyes of Adele Norton were upon them. They knew it afterwards, when she whole village was talking of the barefacedness of the two to stand in the Vicarage garden making their plans, while the poor young wife looked on. Ah! what would the old Vicar have thought of such conduct? And as they talked the good folk nodded their heads, and looked wisely sorrowful.

Neither of them guessed that they were being watched, and neither paid much heed to the expression of their faces. Both hearts were full of a great grief, and it showed all too plainly in their faces.

"And so, Vera, you will not take Brownie as a gift from an old friend! Well, then, I shall take her to London with me, and if you do not claim her within six months I shall have her sold," said Clive. "No, do not look at me. My wife shall not ride her."

Looking at his face, with that expression of set determination upon it, Vera felt that argument was worse than useless.

A silence fell upon them, and they stood for some time gazing over the cold, drear expanse of country.

Vera broke the silence.

"I cannot accept such a present. Do not

be hurt at my refusal. I shall never forget you. I only wish to vanish from the lives of the people in dear old Marlbury. They will all soon forget me," she said.

Clive never forgot her. Years after he remembered how she looked as she stood in the dreary, deserted-looking garden on that most drear November day, with not a ray of sunlight to rest upon her—not a ray of sunlight in her life.

He guessed that she loved Neil St. Croix; he knew that the young doctor loved her, and in his own mind he wondered what it was that kept them apart; but he dared not speak, and it filled him with a strange, painful pleasure to think she would remain single.

He knew that Vera could never love but once. The strong, deep love that her soul was capable of feeling had come; she had loved in vain, but she would never solace herself with another.

"I will not press you, Vera; your instincts are truer than mine," he murmured. "Good-bye, Vera, my little childhood friend!"

He stooped suddenly, and laid a quick but gentle kiss upon the white forehead.

"For old times," he whispered, and strode away, leaving the girl gazing sadly after him; and Neil St. Croix going through the church grounds as a short cut to the house of one of his patients, stopped short in horrified bewilderment. What did that caress mean?

The patient whom he went to see wondered what had come to her doctor that he was so silent and preoccupied. He had fancied Vera cared for him, and that the tale Adele had told her of a dead wife—for it never occurred to him that she would say she yet lived—had caused an estrangement, and now he had seen her—his pure Vera—accept a kiss from Adele's husband, calmly and willingly, as though it were no new thing.

Alas! how easily things go wrong!

Vera went away that night without bidding adieu to any one of those who had called themselves friends in her father's lifetime. Some suspicion of the scandal afloat came to her that very day, though she did not speak of it to Clive, and this had determined her in taking this step of disappearing from the Marlbury world.

Clive, too, went away that night, and the Marlbury world condemned Vera at once. Even the villagers, who had "stuck up" for her, as they termed it, shook their heads when they heard that Clive Norton and Vera Carstairs had disappeared together on the same night.

"Oh, Heaven! and I have let myself love her so!" cried Neil St. Croix, writhing alone in his study with his love, unable even now to tear Vera's image from his heart as unworthy. She, so pure, so innocent! There must be some mistake. Never would he believe her so fallen unless he heard it from her own lips. "I will seek her out, and force the truth from her," he told himself, and then, despite his assertion, he laid his dark head on the table, and hot, bitter tears fell from the keen eyes. What if he should find her unworthy?

Adele Norton was taken ill with a violent attack of neuralgia, brought on by her own passion, and, of course, Neil was sent for.

"She has taken her revenge on me," said Adele, as he entered the room, where she lay, pale and haggard, among a pile of rose-satin pillows; "but," she added, fiercely, eyeing him with those cold, cruel eyes as she spoke, "she has disgraced herself. Ha! ha! she will suffer by-and-by!"

"To whom do you refer?" asked Neil, coldly. "Pardon me, but I thought you sent for me on account of illness."

"And so I did. You know to whom I refer, Dr. St. Croix?" replied Adele, "but you do not know that it was I who separated you. She thinks that you have a living wife. She loves you, but as she could not marry you she has taken her revenge on me."

"I must again ask you to pardon me, but I have no wish to discuss this matter. Why

you told her that falsehood I cannot understand. Allow me," and, taking her hand, Neil counted her pulse in a professional manner.

When he took his leave he had made up his mind to go to London as soon as he could get someone to take charge of his patients; and during those weeks Adele received a letter from her husband, saying that he was going abroad for an indefinite period, and had directed his bankers to forward her allowance to the Towers as usual. Brownie and Hussar, his two pet horses, he had taken with him, the others were at her disposal.

"Brownie!" muttered Adele, viciously; "yes, for her to ride!"

But she was wrong. Clive had given his Brownie into the charge of a friend, with injunctions if ever Vera came to claim her to let the mare go to her without question, as he had told Vera.

"How dare he write to me in this cool manner?" Adele cried out, passionately, "me, his wife!"

"I think you are wronging Miss Carstairs and my son by your thoughts," said a quiet, well-bred voice beside her. "Why, because they both leave Marlbury on the same night, by the same train, should they be found guilty of the worst of crimes?"

"Why? Because Clive loved her before I ever came to Marlbury, because I have seen him caress her, while she stood with her head on his breast; ay, even after we were married!" was the fierce retort. "Was it not because of her that Clive and I quarrelled? Did she not sneak him away, on the day I arrived, to take her for a ride, the artful thing?"

"Adele, you shock me by your unladylike passion! So you quarrelled with Clive? Was not that sufficient to make him go away? Remember, a man does not like his wife to be jealous without cause—it tires him; and, in spite of what you say, I believe Vera is being misjudged. She has good blood in her veins, and blood will tell."

Vera Carstairs, you have an unexpected friend in the person of this proud, white-haired Lady Norton; and having come to the conclusion that Vera was innocent Lady Norton lost no time in writing to her son for an explanation.

The answer came after the lapse of two months, when the earth was white with an early fall of snow. Lady Norton's letter had gone to Paris, then followed on to Rome, by fits and starts, and at last reached him at Naples, and the answer was just what the mother had expected.

"You see, Adele," said the proud old lady, showing her daughter-in-law the epistle, "how wrong you were? Read for yourself."

"Dearest mother," so ran Clive's reply, "never has letter of yours astonished me as the one I received last night. Vera told me of her intended departure from Marlbury certainly; and we bade one another good-bye in the Rectory garden, but where she went, or where she now is, I cannot tell you, as she absolutely refused to let me know, saying that she wished to vanish from Marlbury utterly since they had behaved so coldly after her father's death. It is Adele's fault that she left. Adele set afloat a scandalous report about Vera and myself because she was jealous, and I know now that it had come to Vera's ears. I will do all in my power to shield our proud old name from contumely; but, mother, I cannot go back to my wife—not yet, at any rate. I loved her, but she has killed it by her dangerous jealousy, and—but, there, that is best left unsaid. Only believe, mother, that I know nothing of Vera Carstairs' whereabouts.—With fond love, believe me, dear mother, your broken-hearted son,

"CLIVE NORTON."

Adele gave back the letter without a word. Clive had left her for ever! She knew in her heart that he spoke truth, but with it, a cruelty natural to her she swore that Vera should be kept from her happiness—the happiness which

she had missed by her own passion of jealousy.

How futile are such oaths sworn by such creatures the future will show.

CHAPTER VII.

Poor, dirty, smoky, toiling, much-abused London was looking its dirtiest, smokiest one afternoon in the beginning of December. A grey mist, which did duty as light, hung over the city, and the dull yellow glare of gas-jets in the shops only served to add to the dreariness outside.

Dirty, greasy slush clung to the boots of pedestrians, and worked its way up the ragged, dragging skirts of the workmen's wives as they toiled along the cold streets. This slush had been white, pure, glistening snow but an hour before; but the heavy, plodding feet of the passengers had soon trodden the purity out of it. So runs the world.

And down one of the streets that slant towards the Thames Embankment a tall, erect figure, clad in black, came with steady, graceful steps. The face was that of Vera Carstairs, but grown more womanly, with a calm, cold glance of the clear brown eyes that told its own tale of proud self-command, a close setting of the red, girlish mouth, a haughtier carriage of the brown head. Vera Carstairs grown more lovely, more womanly, but yet with enough of the old Vera about her to make the change more charming still.

There was no sign of poverty about her; the close fitting sealakin paletôt, which just disclosed a flounce of rich black silk above the well-fitting boots, the soft crape bonnet and perfect gloves belonged to easy circumstances; and yet a stranger, looking at her as she walked along with that calm, cold face, would say that it was not the face of a happy woman. The unobtrusive might envy her her beauty and rich attire, but to the reader of human faces would come the thought—"Surely a broken heart beats beneath those soft furs!"

Straight on, without looking to the right or left, went Vera Carstairs towards the Temple Station, down the many stairs to the platform, where the train waited puffing and panting, like all else in London, in a hurry to commence its journey. It moved off as Vera walked slowly along, and as she passed one of the first-class compartments a man's face drew her attention and held her gaze till the train had flashed out of the station.

Neil St. Croix! In London! What was he doing there? were the questions that flashed through her brain in a moment of time. He had recognised her—she knew that by the look of startled wonder in his eyes.

Her face had grown paler than before when she took her seat in the next train, and as she sank wearily back one of the passengers bent forward, asking if she were faint. She replied in the negative, and then fell into a reverie, nearly letting the train carry her on to its journey's end in her preoccupation. She got out at Charing Cross, where she found an old lady, with a kindly face peeping out from a mass of furs, awaiting her.

"Well, Vera," she said, in a gentle voice, that accorded with her expression, "I went to Mr. Clynton's, and found that Mr. Norton himself had given instructions for Brownie to be sold, and so I bought her, and have had her sent to Kensington. She seems a nice, gentle creature, not at all likely to shy or get restive," she went on, her idea of a good horse being one that would jog on in an ambling sort of way, but never be guilty of a canter.

"Brownie can shy and grow restive too," replied Vera, with a half smile. "It was not her gentleness that induced me to buy her, auntie. It was that I had my first ride on Brownie, when dear papa was with me. Brownie is connected with so many things that occurred in that dear past."

This was said in a sadder, graver tone, for she was thinking of that ride to Dr. St. Croix's house on Brownie. Ah! dear old Brownie, she would recall many a sad hour as well as pleasant ones.

She smiled again sadly to herself as she remembered Neil telling her that she was a study in brown; and again, that Brownie's mistress, as he laughingly styled her, ought to have been named Brownie also.

Foolish nonsense, perhaps; but such nonsense, when it recalls a happy past, is often held more dear than a whole host of sensible remarks.

She had felt a thrill of foolish happiness when he spoke of the two Brownies, looking at her so gently with those keen, searching eyes of his.

"Well, my dear!" remarked the Hon. Mrs. Rosslyn, who had taken Vera up on account of her unaffected manner and rare beauty directly the girl appeared before her eyes, "it would be just as well if we return home; the carriage is waiting."

"You are not curious to know what I have been doing?" asked Vera, as they passed slowly up the stairs, and so came out into the little narrow street, where stood a neat little brougham, on the box of which sat a sulky coachman—sulky at having his horses kept waiting in the cold.

"Not if you would wish to keep it secret," was the pleasant and sincerely-spoken reply.

"I do not, auntie. I went to visit old Anna White. She lives in Catherine-street, and I walked with her as far as the Temple Gardens—her park, as she terms it," said Vera, smiling.

"Ah! And now, Vera, who else did you see? There is a look on your face that tells me you have seen or heard something. Your eyes are misty with some thought of the past."

The old lady spoke so gently, so gravely, that Vera bent forward in the carriage, half whispering,—

"I have seen him, auntie."

To the old lady's question of "where," Vera replied by telling all she had to tell.

It was not much, but Mrs. Rosslyn told herself that if she were a man who loved, as he could not help loving, Vera, she would have followed her even if there were a— But the Hon. Mrs. Rosslyn had her doubts as to this wife, and at once set herself to find out.

Neil St. Croix, sitting in his surgery, just finishing up business preparatory to leaving Marlbury for London, was startled by the unmistakable rat-tat of a telegraph boy at his front door; and a few minutes later his boy handed him an orange-coloured envelope.

"Your mother dangerously ill. Come at once," were the words that met his gaze; and in the horror of the first moment he forgot that he must give up his search for Vera, as his mother was staying at a little countrified seaside town.

It was on his way thence that Vera had flashed past him, calling up all the joy and pain of her love to mingle with the pain and suspense on his mother's account.

He had seen her—his love, his Vera, whom he had vainly tried to find during all these weary months—and he could not speak with her; could only sink back with a half groan at what seemed to him just then a cruel fate that brought the cup of happiness so often to his lips only to snatch it away.

The quick look of passionate, startled joy on Vera's face sent the blood leaping madly through his veins, and he almost forgot the sad cause of his journey—the fact that he was as far from knowing Vera's whereabouts as ever, in the exultation of remembering that involuntary confession of her love.

The country through which he travelled was all wrapped in a cloak of pure white, and the tall trees stretched their snow-clad, lank arms over ice-bound streams.

Calm and quietly beautiful looked the world to him, as he gazed out at the white panorama passing before his eyes!

At length, after hours of travelling, Neil

found himself at his destination. To march off without looking to see if a carriage were awaiting him was, of course, the most natural thing for him to do under the circumstances; and accordingly away he went up the High-street, then through a small byway, and finally into a small square of prettily-built bay-windowed villas, with stained-glass doors, which stood invitingly open in summer, as if such people as thieves were unknown.

But these doors were all religiously closed now, and Neil had to knock and ring to gain ingress.

The boy who answered his summons stared in surprise, but, of course, made no remark until Neil put the question,—

"How is my mother? Which room is she in?"

"Madame St. Croix is well, I think, sir," was the astonishing reply. "She is in the drawing-room, Mr. Neil."

Neil gazed at the boy as if he had lost his senses; then, turning abruptly, made his way to the room indicated.

"Mother!" he exclaimed, on beholding that lady seated in her accustomed easy chair doing lace work, "what is the meaning of the telegram which I received, saying that you were dangerously ill?"

His mother raised her eyes quietly, as became a woman of her distinction in society, showing neither joy nor surprise at his coming, and answered in a clear, pleasant voice,—

"You are the victim of a hoax, my son; I was never better. What a waste of time, and, I suppose, money! You should try and find out who sent it."

Neil turned away impatiently; his mother's coldness vexed him. What did it matter who sent it? He had lost sight of Vera again, and all for nothing. "I suppose it is another of Adele Bertram's tricks; because she has ruined her own life she would ruin ours," he told himself, and Neil had guessed the truth.

Adele knew instinctively why he was going to London, and, risking all, telegraphed to a friend at Southdon to send for Neil, thinking that, at any rate, she would keep his happiness from him as long as possible.

She had traced Vera, and discovered that she and her aunt were going to Leedon, a little, old-fashioned village on the Essex coast, to spend Christmas with the Hon. Mrs. Rosslyn's mother-in-law, and she hoped to utterly separate them. But—

"The best laid plans o' mice an' men
Gang aft a'gley."

Neil did not, as Adele had planned, start immediately for London or Marlbury; he chose, instead, to stay a short time, and think out the strange animosity that Adele bore him. He could not tell that she hated him because he saw beauty of character and loveliness of form in the girl who was her rival—of her own making, truly, but there was a cruel sting in that thought—she herself had driven her husband to love Vera Carstairs. She would like to kill her!

"Mother," he said one morning, as he rose from the breakfast-table, "I am going to take a ride into Leedon, and shall call upon old Mrs. Rosslyn. Any message?"

"No," she replied, quietly. "Mind you are back to dinner; I never wait, you know that," and then she settled her skirts and swept out of the breakfast-room with a soft rustle of crisp cambric and a flutter of lace.

"There is no fear of my being detained there," he muttered, as he sauntered out of the house to the stables. "I feel half inclined not to call; prosy old thing, the dowager."

And so, only being half inclined when he started, by the time he had reached the pretty village he was quite determined not to call. Leedon was always pretty; in the summer-time great oaks and chestnuts spread their thick-leaved arms over the gabled roof-tops of the large rambling buildings occupied by the "gentry," and completely hid the smaller dwellings; sweet odours from hidden blos-

soms made to breathe an exquisite joy. In the winter the old grey, moss-grown houses stood up amongst the tall, brown trunks of the trees like grim idols watching over the small, white cottages; and the white snow made a fair, soft carpet for the red-breasted things that hopped so saucily about.

Neil concluded his business, then went to the livery stables to put up his horse while he sauntered off for a stroll. He did not pay much heed to what was going on around him, merely giving directions and then turning away; but to his surprise he felt a cold, soft nose laid against his hand, and then a low whinny of pleasure sounded in his ears.

Wheeling round quickly Neil saw what appeared to be "Brownie" standing beside him, with a look of recognition in its large, intelligent eyes.

"Brownie," he said, a trifle huskily, laying his hand on the pretty creature's neck, and the mare threw back its ears and again whinnied, showing him plainly that it was no mistake. Brownie stood before him!

"Could you tell me who rides this mare?" he asked, turning to one of the men.

Oh! that belongs to the Rosalyns. Their stables is not big enough to hold all their ones, sir, so we get them sent down here," he man explained; for which piece of information the young doctor bestowed upon him half-a-crown, much to his astonishment.

His determination not to call at Hill Lodge vanished in a moment, for the stableman had scarcely pocketed his ducatoon ere Neil was striding away up a hill where his beacon light lured him on—a very substantial light—being formed in the shape of a long, red-bricked house.

"Yes, Mrs. Rosalyn was at home," he was informed, and was duly ushered into the presence of the "prosy old dowager."

After making the ordinary inquiries about her health, &c., Neil plunged into his real motive for visiting her.

"Oh, Brownie! Why she is Vera's. My daughter-in-law and her niece, Vera Carstairs, are staying with me," was the unexpected reply.

"Is Miss Carstairs at home? I know her well. Can I—"

"She is out on the lake; you can go and find her if you like," said Mrs. Rosalyn. "She is a dear, sweet girl, and I have grown quite fond of her, though she has only been here a week. A sad thing, her father's sudden death, and very wise of her to go at once to her aunt. Not many girls would have had the sense."

Hear the old dowager paused for breath, and poor Neil, fearing another rhodomontade, hastened to thank her for her kind permission, and made his exit.

With a beating heart he went down the wide, but short avenue of bare chestnuts, that stood like gaunt, dark spectres in the crisp air. On either side stretched a broad sheet of white, and further on was the lake, frozen over.

At first he thought that Vera was not there, for only the clear white lake and sloping banks met his view; but presently, as he drew nearer, he saw a tall, slight figure emerge from behind a clump of evergreens and advance slowly towards him.

It was Vera—Vera, with that new womanliness upon her that struck him as an added charm. He had ample time to scrutinise her, for she was evidently thinking deeply; but as they came close something told the girl that she was no longer alone, and looking up quickly she saw him.

For a moment she looked as if about to faint, but she quickly recovered herself, and put out her little hand, saying softly, joyously (she could not command her voice),—

"Dr. St. Croix!"

"Vera!"

He took the hand she gave him, and held it while, hurriedly, passionately, but clearly, he told her all he guessed of Adele's plot, and what she had herself told him in her mad anger against Clive! and Vera stood there,

white as the world around her, wondering how a woman could have conceived such a plot merely from unfounded jealousy.

"What have you to answer, Vera? Oh, my darling, I have suffered so!" cried Neil, at last.

"And I, Neil, for I love you!"

The words were simply spoken, in a low, quick-breathed tone; and the sweet face grew passion-pale as she laid her brown head on his breast, lifting her brown eyes, so dark and limpid with love, to his.

"Never to part," he whispered; then in a more ordinary tone, "I had a letter from Clive the other day. He has made up his mind never to come back to England. Poor fellow, what a ruined life!"

"But how came you to be here?" asked Vera; and Neil had to go over the story of his meeting with Brownie, and her friendly recognition.

Vera smiled softly as he told her. Dear old Brownie! She would love her more than ever now, for it had given her back her lover.

Two months later, when the earth was smiling at the promise of spring, Neil St. Croix returned to Marlbury—not alone, but with his bride, Vera.

Their home-coming was unannounced. No one knew when to expect them, so when Adele Norton rode past their brougham and caught sight of the occupants, it is no wonder she lost her presence of mind, and whipped up her horse so fiercely.

Vera saw her, and read the tale of her suffering in the haggard eyes and careworn expression on the strange, beautiful face.

"I pity her," she said, turning to her husband. "I wish Clive would forgive her."

That evening she came into the surgery, where Neil was looking over his books, and holding out a letter asked him if she might send it.

It was to Clive Norton. A gentle, womanly letter, asking him, as an old friend, what he intended doing with his life; if he could not try, by a little forbearance, to cure the irrational temper of the woman who bore his name, and who loved him with the whole of her passionate heart.

And the reply came in the shape of Olive himself. He had nipped his passion for Vera Carstairs in the bud, and could look Vera St. Croix honestly in the face when they met at the Towers two days after his return.

The great and overwhelming love had deepened into a pure, deep reverence, that put the possibility of his again loving his wife for ever out of the question.

He might grow to regard her with a calm, quiet affection; but the first love had died. Adele knew this, knew that she could never hope to hold the same place in her husband's heart, and in her manner there was a submissive sadness which gave to her the charm which had before been wanting.

The villagers of Marlbury, in their honest repentance at the injustice done to their old Vicar's daughter, clubbed together to buy a testimonial for the doctor and his wife, which they carried to the house in triumph, and presented with many protestations of goodwill; and Vera taking the gift—a pretty silver biscuit basket—told them it was worth the pain to afterwards be so assured of the love they had felt for her and her father—a speech which sent them away happy.

Adele had confessed all to Vera—how she had added those lines to her note, and sent that telegram to Neil; and in giving and asking pardon the two women became friends, greatly to the delight of Lady Norton.

"How is Brownie?" asked Clive, one evening, as he stood by the young doctor, and his wife after dinner—they were dining at the Towers. "I heard that you bought her. Poor old Brownie! She caused you no end of trouble."

"And," said Vera, softly, shyly, "if it had not been for her I should now be away in Switzerland with my aunt, and Neil searching

for me in London. Ah, I love Brownie! I owe all my happiness, my husband, to Brownie."

[THE END.]

AN ELEPHANT'S AFFECTION.

DURING the recent season for the capture of elephants in Ceylon, a remarkable instance of the affection of a female of the species for her calf was offered to the hunter's notice:—

A herd was duly surrounded by the capturing party; and with the wonderfully intelligent aid of their "kunkies"—trained elephants, who are wicked enough to help make their luckless cousins fast—four or five animals were taken.

Among them was a handsome young tusker about six feet high, and very active. The rest of the herd escaped, and dashed away in great confusion.

The hunting party secured their prizes, and conveyed them to the camp. Early next morning a great stir was noticed in the ranks of the captured elephants.

A huge female was observed standing beside the prisoned tusker, and doing her best to liberate him. It was the calf's mother, who had made her way over eight miles of country, between the scene of her loss and the hunting-camp, to trace out her young one and bring him home.

This feat she had accomplished in the middle of the night, and through a dense forest; nor was it easy to discover how she had followed his track so correctly and speedily.

The mother and child worked together excitedly at the nooses and knots.

When the prisoner fell over from exhaustion, the mother tenderly helped him to his feet, and renewed her labours. Her devotion cost her her liberty; for, as she was giving up the struggle in despair and moving off, she, too, was captured, and the pair forwarded to the station together.

TREES OF ICELAND.—Many of you have heard of the one tree in Iceland; a dwarfed thing that the people wrapped in clothes each winter to protect it from the severity of frosts. I had often been told and had read of this wonder, and naturally was anxious to see it; but to-day, in Reykjavik, I came upon three as large and handsome mountain ash or roan trees as I remember ever of seeing. Standing about twenty-five feet in height, they spread their branches over a large area, and are to all appearances healthy, flourishing trees, of which the people take no more care than we in our warmer climates do of ours. Here, too, I saw several people preparing to put white awnings over their doors and windows, or building cloth-covered bowers in their very small gardens, in which to spend the long summer evenings when it is not evening, but broad daylight.

IN MUNICH.—If you are a stranger, you find a seat, call a girl, and order a mug of beer—that is, if you drink beer. If you are to the manner born, you wend your way to a big tank into which water is always running, and pick out your mug. This tank is always two-thirds full of huge stone mugs with big handles and pewter lids. The German walks up, thrusts his hand into the water, and, drawing out a mug, looks it all over. If it suits him—they are all alike—he rinses it, and makes his way to the place where he gets it filled with beer, then rejoins his companions. Beer will keep deliciously cool for half-an-hour in one of these mugs, and as they hold fully a quart each, one lasts a long time. And what a merry sight it is to see the people, in groups of four, two or three to a dozen, all bound together in the most jovial social intercourse by this national beverage! They sit at the tables talking, laughing, eating, and drinking, paying little attention to the music, but having a jolly time.

FACETIE.

A QUARRYMAN said he couldn't see any danger in smoking while he was handling powder. He can't see anything now.

"Yes, sir," said Jenkins, "Smithers is a man who keeps his word; but then he has to," "How is that?" asked Jones. "Because no one will take it."

"Mercy me! what are those horrible sounds upstairs?" "Oh, that is nothing but dear George. I suppose he has lost his collar stud again."

A WATERY spendthrift, being asked by a banker to define the meaning of the word "business," unhesitatingly replied, "other people's money."

There is the age of epigram. We are reminded that it is harder for a woman to hold her tongue than for a man to hold a baby; that, in a game of cards, a good deal depends on good playing, and good playing depends on a good deal.

EARLY IMPRESSIONS.—"Smith, how is it that you always get such good bargains?" queried Jones. "Because I was taught from my infancy habits of thrift, patience and economy," replied Smith. "My father was always drumming it into me to 'wait a little while and you'll purchase cheaper.' Why, even my mother used to sing 'Bye-low, baby!' before I could walk." Jones was perfectly satisfied with the explanation.

VERY RARE.—A somewhat opinionated young artist painted a picture that he thought was an improvement on anything Raphael, or any of those old fellows, had hung up before the world, and he carried it to Mr. F— for inspection. "I have a picture here," he said, with great trepidation, as he came in, "which I would like you to see." And he took the wrappers off it as a mother would a baby. "Um—ah—um," said Mr. F—, looking at it sharply; "did you do this without any outside aid?" "Yes, sir," responded the amateur, with a rising pride. "Um—ah—um," continued Mr. F—; "it is a rare picture, sir—a rare picture." "Ah, sir, thank you, thank you very much, indeed," stammered the youngster, tickled nearly to death. "Oh don't mention it, sir. It is a rare picture, sir, quite rare in fact, it is only half done. I might say it is almost raw."

A PRACTICAL JOKE.

It is related of Sothorn, the famous actor, that his fondness for practical joking was almost unparalleled. On one occasion, it is related, he gave a dinner party to about a dozen gentlemen, of whom one, designated as Thompson, was late. The others had just sat down to their soup, when a loud ring announced the arrival of the late Mr. Thompson. Sothorn hastily exclaimed,—

"Let us all get under the table. Fancy Thompson's surprise, when he beholds a long table devoid of guests."

Sothorn's love of practical joking was well known, so that the company were not astonished at the odd proposition, and in a couple of seconds every man was concealed from view beneath the table. Sothorn made a half dive, merely to hoodwink his unsuspecting guests and lead them to suppose he intended to join them under the mahogany, then resumed his place at the head of the table. Thompson entered, stared at his host for a moment, and then exclaimed,—

"Hallo! where are all the fellows? I thought I would surely be the last man to-day."

Sothorn shook his head in a lugubrious fashion, and in melancholy tones replied,—

"I can't explain it, my dear fellow, but the moment they heard your name they all got under the table."

The expression on the faces of the hoaxed guests as they slowly emerged, one by one, from their concealment, can be better imagined than described. Sothorn looked the picture of innocence.

The man who first asked—"Is life worth living?" died owing a small fortune in doctors' bills.

A good advertisement appeared on a sign: "Here's where you get a meal like your mother used to give you."

A LIVERPOOL woman, to relieve her husband, who was charged with cutting off the end of her nose, swore that she bit it off herself.

Nor a bad answer was made by a sportsman returning from the marshes, when asked if he had shot anything. "No," he said; "but I have given the birds a good serenading."

FOND MOTHER: "You are very sick, my child: I will send for Doctor Jones." Daughter quickly: "Not Doctor Jones, mother dear; he is engaged already."

"Women, my boy," said a parent to his son, "are a delusion and a snare." "It is queer," murmured the boy, "how people will hug a delusion."

"ALGERNON, I have a stitch in my side." "I am not surprised, my dear. You were hemmed in by the crowd at the party last night." "No; I think I got it while hasting the turkey." "You tuck too much pains over it." "Algermon, why will you persist in ruffling my temper in this way?" "Merely a biased notion of yours and furbelow my intentions."

It is in no sense part of a British Minister's duty to act as social sponsor for ambitious nobodies, or to introduce at Court people who do not know how to behave when they get there. A once-too-easily-persuaded Minister yielded to the teasing of one of his countrywomen and presented her at the Court of one of the Continental nations. The Queen received her most kindly; but great was the Minister's horror when to her Majesty's kindly welcome the woman replied, "I really feel as if I had known you a long time; you know we go to the same chiropodist."

PUTTING ON STYLE.

A couple of well-dressed countrymen from the north of England strolled into a celebrated restaurant, sat down at a table, and glanced about, making a remarkably unsuccessful attempt to appear at home.

"Gentlemen, what do you wish?" asked the waiter, handing them the bill of fare.

They looked at each other and then at the bill of fare, but they could not find out what they wanted. The waiter became a trifle impatient. Just at this crisis a gentleman, probably a Frenchman, who was eating his dinner called out,—

"Waiter, un verre d'eau."

"Give me one of them, too," said one of the countrymen.

"One of what?"

"A verdo."

The waiter smiled, disappeared, and returned in a moment with a glass containing some transparent fluid.

"The same for me," said countryman number two.

Once more the waiter disappeared, and in a short time brought the desired refreshment.

The two strangers looked at their glasses, then sipped the contents and gazed inquiringly at each other.

"Well, my boy, you'll have to drink this here stuff a long while before you like it," remarked countryman number one.

"It don't brace a feller up worth a farthing, but here she goes."

The two glasses were emptied, and then, with a very majestic air, one of them thumped on the table. The waiter came.

"What's the damage?"

"Nothing at all, sir."

"We ain't doing London on the cheap plan," and he squeezed a sixpence into the waiter's palm.

When they got out in the Strand one of them said,—

"By George, if I didn't know that ere stuff was verdo, I'd swear it was water."

A comic paper says:—"The festive oyster now gets into stew and broils." Probably, like others, he would avoid these difficulties if he kept his mouth shut.

Said an astronomer to a bright-eyed girl, when talking of rainbows, "Did you ever see a lunar bow, miss?" "I have seen a beau by moonlight, if that is what you mean," was the sly rejoinder.

"It seems, prisoner, that you took fifteen-pence from the prosecutor's till. Now, I put it to you seriously, was it worth your while to risk your character, your liberty, your whole future, for such a trifle?" "Certainly not, your honour; but I did not know there was so little in the till—I took all there was."

It was one of the genus tramp. He knocked at the door of a house, and when a kindly-looking woman opened it he said:—"Madam, I am very hungry. I have had nothing for a week back." "Why, you poor soul," said the good woman, "wait a moment, and I'll find something for you." And she gave him an old plaster and closed the door before he had finished thanking her.

A DONKEY was surprised one morning when his master came out and called him a thief. "Really, but I do not deserve such abuse," said the donkey. "I have missed three of my choicest fowls," continued the peasant, "and you alone could have taken them." "But as I do not eat flesh, what could I do with your chickens?" "Ah! then it was the fox, and, as you did not drive him away, and as he is now beyond my reach, you must expect to suffer for it." Then he turned to and beat the donkey with great violence.—Moral: When misfortune comes to a man through his own neglect, he blames everybody but himself.

A WOMAN is far more sensitive than a man. She has finer feelings and a more delicate mind. There are a very few men who realise this, and in consequence women are made to endure much unnecessary suffering. One of our merchants was going to church with his wife on a Sunday morning, when she suddenly stopped and put her hand to her head. "What's the matter?" he asked, startled by the look of her face. "Oh! I have got on my brown hat." "Eh?" ejaculated the astonished man. She burst into uncontrollable tears. "What, Martha, what is the matter with you?" he demanded. "Don't you see what is the matter?" she returned in a sobbing voice: "I've got on my brown hat with my striped silk. Oh, what will people say?"

THE eccentric "Father Prout," when paying a visit to a literary lady of his acquaintance, found her engaged in conversation with a stranger of agreeable aspect, and evidently accustomed to good society, but whose outward attire, somewhat resembling that of the late Lord Brougham, betokened little care or attention on the part of the wearer. When the latter had left the room, the hostess, turning to Mahony, spoke in enthusiastic terms of the gentleman in question, particularly dwelling on his well-bred ease and courtly tone. "Ah," growled the cynical humourist, "your friend, whoever he may be, can well afford to put some polish in his manner, for he certainly keeps none for his boots!"

A CERTAIN novelist, who had disposed of his bantling to a publisher on the unpromising terms of "half-profits," finding that the long-expected cheque did not appear, betook himself to the establishment presided over by his Mæcenas, and inquired how it was that, although the work had been well reviewed and had reached a second edition, he had not yet received a farthing. "My dear sir," blandly replied the publisher, "you are perhaps not aware that the expenses of advertising and bringing out a book are enormous, and absorb a great deal of money; there may be a trifle coming to you, but you must really have patience, for we cannot afford to pay sharp." "Suit me just as well," coolly retorted his creditor, "if you pay blunt."

SOCIETY.

THE Princess of Wales looked remarkably well, and clearly made an extra effort to appear affable, on the occasion of the visit of the Prince and Princess to Whitechapel. The Prince looked fagged and heavy-eyed, and spoke as if he were suffering from a sore throat. Accompanying them were Princess Louise of Wales and Prince Albert Victor, both apparently in the best of health and spirits.

Both the Prince and Princess have inspected the structural additions and alterations at Marlborough House, and pronounced them on the whole satisfactory.

THE Duchess of Albany with her two children have returned to Claremont from the Highlands. The atmospheric severities of the past few weeks have not improved the little ones' general health, and the slightest symptom of their indisposition creates a lively alarm in the Duchess.

PRINCE AND PRINCESS WALDEMAR intend spending several weeks at Cannes before settling down to the more commonplace duties of married life. The young couple planned a surprise visit to the bridegroom's mother before they left Paris on Wednesday last week. They had said good-bye, and the Queen of Denmark thought she had seen the last of them. But not so, for they suddenly presented themselves the next day at the Hôtel Bristol, and considerably startled Her Majesty by appearing before her unannounced. The surprise was, of course, a pleasant one. Later on the happy young couple started southwards.

THE Prince and Princess Teck are still at White Lodge, Richmond Park. The young Princess Mary of Teck, who has created such a *furor* in English society, is much more desirous of staying in England than abroad, notwithstanding all the many stories of the claims on her hand.

THE DUKE OF GRAFTON's recent concert was a grand success. Some of the toilettes were extremely pretty. Lady Spencer wore ruby velvet. Lady Charles FitzRoy, white silk, with a petticoat covered with pearls. Mrs. Philip Mackenzie, train and bodice of pale blue silk, brocaded with terra-cotta flowers; petticoat of the latter shade, and lace. Hon. Blanche FitzRoy, white crape, looped up with watered ribbon and gold acorns; gold beads round her neck. Her cousin, Miss FitzRoy, had a pretty dress of blue Bengaline, made plain; the bodice had folds of the same shade of colour next the skin, and no white tucker; the effect was good. Miss Buxton wore white.

At the splendid fancy-dress ball, held at the Art Gallery, Exeter, given in connection with the costume bazaar, some of the costumes were magnificent, most of them being taken from Gilbert and Sullivan's operas. Among them may be named Lady Evelyn Courtenay as Lady Sangazure, in the *Sorcerer*, who wore an old-fashioned dress of black velvet with a white apron. Mrs. Walrond, as Patience, in a pale blue brocade with olive green ribbons, and a straw hat with wild flowers. Mrs. Hamilton, as Princess Ida, wore a cassock of yellow brocade silk, and flowing robe of white plush, with ornaments of pearls and diamonds. Miss Mabel Rose, as Iolanthe, was attired in a white Greek dress with silver wings, trident, and star. Miss Truscott, as Ruth, in the *Pirates of Penzance*, appeared in a rich crimson petticoat, crossed by a handsome silken sash, with a pistol inserted in the waist; turban adorned with gold coins. Mrs. C. Roberts, as Queen of the Fairies, in *Iolanthe*, wore an enchanting dress of white and gold, with golden wings and wand; the attendant fairies, six young ladies, wore Greek dresses of mauve, laburnum colour, coral pink, cream colour, and green, with silver wings and stars.

STATISTICS.

CO-OPERATION IN ENGLAND.—English co-operative societies have transacted a business during the past twenty years amounting to £2,800,000,000. The profits were £21,200,000. There are 1,264 societies, with about 700,000 members representing heads of families, making in all 2,750,000 people. The increase of capital in ten years was 160 per cent. The co-operative manual which furnishes these figures goes into a vast amount of detail to show the operations of these societies. The movement took its present shape in 1864, when the membership was 17,500. In four years the membership was 75,000; in seven years, 115,000. The movement took wholesale proportions very early. In 1833 the drapery branch of the business involved a capital of £200,000. Furniture was dealt in, butter agencies were opened in Ireland, and houses were opened in Hamburg and Copenhagen for the transaction of business. The societies have now their own fleet. They have agencies in New York, where in one year over £2,000,000 was handled. They have depôts at Liverpool, Manchester and elsewhere, and they insure their own property. They make boots and shoes, and soaps. They do much of their own milling, and are every year expanding their operations in a manner which shows that there is ability in the working classes, when it is properly selected, to manage their own affairs.

GEMS.

Grand temples are built of small stones and great lives are made up of trifling events.

SOCIETY is always trying in some way or other to grind us down to a single flat surface.

HE that does a base thing in zeal to serve his friend, burns the golden thread that ties their hearts together.

Of all conditions to which the heart is subject, suspense is the one that most gnaws and cankers in the frame.

COMPLAISANCE renders a superior amiable, an equal agreeable, and an inferior acceptable; it levels distinction, sweetens conversation, and makes everyone in the company pleased with himself.

No one is responsible for more than he has to bestow, whether it be of time, intelligence, or power; but each one is responsible for what he does possess, and must decide for himself in what way to employ it.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

CLOVE CAKE.—Take 1lb. of sugar, 1lb. of flour, ½lb. of butter, four eggs, a cup of milk, a little mace and cinnamon, and one teaspoonful of cloves; fruit if you like.

WASH FOR WHITENING THE NAILS.—Take two drachms of diluted sulphuric acid, one drachm of tincture of myrrh, added to four ounces of spring water; first cleanse the hands, and then apply the wash.

STRAW BONNETS may be cleaned by washing with soap and water, rinsed in clean water (first removing the wires), and dried in the air; they must then be washed over with white of egg, well-beaten. To bleach them you need only place them in a box with a saucer filled with burning sulphur, and cover up, so that the fumes may act upon them.

TEST FOR POISONOUS PAPER HANGINGS.—Take common spirit of hartshorn, or ammonia is a sure one for arsenic. On application the beautiful but dangerous green turns to a blue. The existence of arsenic in rooms hung with green paper may also be detected immediately by lighting a bit of the suspected paper at a candle. When the paper is well lighted, blow it out, then smell the smoke; if it contain arsenic, the smell will be that of garlic.

MISCELLANEOUS.

A MOTHER'S LOVE.—"Who's out there?" said a young fellow at a police station, as the door opened on him and let him out. One person was waiting at the station, beside the police and a lawyer or two. It was a woman. She sat with a veil drawn around her face, and with her hands clasped in her lap. "I tell you," said one of the wise counsel who stood by, "that the mother is about the last one to forget her boy." The lawyer never rendered a wiser judgment than this lesson, from the city prison. They sit there, the mothers, morning after morning, and wait for the bad boys, sobbing about them, and praying for them and paying for them. The first comers at the station in the morning are the mothers. They are often there before the breakfast hour, and always wait patiently for the verdict. Many of them have become familiar to the officers, for theirs is an old quest—calling as they do whenever the boy is missing, often to find him there and often not. The police tell of one father and mother whose property has gone, the farm mortgaged and the homestead sold, to settle with the courts for the misdeeds of an erring daughter and a misguided son. The police station shows up lots of the sad sides of life.

A SELF-POSSESSED MANNER.—If you would be an agreeable conversationalist, cultivate repose of manner. If you are restless and vehement, you will be considered weak. So you must not fidget in your chair, nor run your fingers through your hair, nor crack your finger-joints, nor gesticulate like a political orator. All of these things are in bad form, and make people wish you had sent regrets. You must avoid interrupting other talkers, also, and learn to control your temper, and say as little as possible about yourself. No matter how bored you may be, assume the virtue of being interested, and look pleasant at any sacrifice of sincerity and self-respect. Politeness exacts that you do unto others at such times as you expect them to do unto you when your turn comes. Your language should be simple and terse, but clear and comprehensive, and free from slang. Do not seek to shine as a humourist unless you are very confident that the company is an easy one to amuse; but if another person makes such a venture it is your duty to laugh, even if his jokes are so thin and flat that you long to strangle him. The amenities of social conversation do not permit the introduction of political or religious topics, for the reason that they can rarely be discussed in a calm and kind spirit.

PORCELAIN MANUFACTURE.—For the last half-century—indeed, from an earlier period—the French factory at Sevres has been losing ground in public estimation. A period of great political changes is not prosperous to such institutions. Lately it has done but little more than reproduce its old models. It is said that it is likely now to push forward in the direction both of novelty and of excellence. It was a happy chance to which it owed its original fame and prosperity. What is called "soft porcelain" had been produced at Vincennes about 1740, and fifteen years later the old factory was removed to Sevres under the patronage of Madame de Pompadour. It was here that in 1798, quite accidentally, the superintendent of the works, Magnier, discovered what is now known as haolin and pibutone, and these discoveries led to the production of that "hard porcelain" which is one variety of the china of commerce. It is announced that quite recently the present superintendent, M. Lauth, has come upon a new porcelain very superior to the old Sevres. Unlike Magnier's discovery, this is not the result of a happy chance. For ten years M. Lauth has been testing, investigating, and combining, and he claims for his new produce all the qualities of surface and capacities of taking glaze and colour enjoyed by the clay to which the Chinese have given their name.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

- L. CLARK.—We do not know of it.
- J. H.—We cannot recommend foreign lotteries.
- JOAN OF ARC.—We gave the stamp illustration in No. 1021, post free, three halfpence in stamps.
- JACOBUS.—The style is good, but rather slovenly. It would not do for a merchants' office.
- LARRADOR.—1. At any good booksellers or a railway stall for a few shillings. 2. Good writing. 3. Yea.
- E. S.—1. Wrapped in white paper, bright brown; pale blue ribbon would suit it. 2. Wrapped in tissue paper; fawn colour: bright or dark blue ribbon.
- AN ANXIOUS ONE.—We should advise you to have nothing whatever to do with them if you can possibly avoid it.
- MIRIAM.—1. Leave nature alone, and take plenty of exercise. 2. Try nitric acid. 3. Nothing that is not injurious.
- D. C. L.—"Chi dice Donna dice Danno" is an Italian proverb, which, translated, means, "Who says woman says mischief."
- W. W.—Take the advice of a friend, a cook should pay particular attention to her hands, which ought always to be clean.
- P. R. J.—The Archbishopric of York was once superior to and took precedence of that of Canterbury; in 1073, however, it was reversed.
- G. R. C.—The best advice a friend can give you is, that whilst at school attend to your education, then you will be better fitted to choose a husband.
- Y. W.—Yea, you are quite correct. Detroit is the oldest city in the west of North America. It was built by the French about 1670.
- X. Y. Z.—If you are under twenty-one you need not give notice. If over that age you must now give a month's notice.
- AMELIA A. H.—1. Any light colour, blue, mauve, or brown, would be suitable. 2. John means "beloved of the Lord." 3. It depends what the stains are caused by.
- GREENWICH.—If he is solvent he can make a post nuptial settlement, which should be drawn by a respectable solicitor, and he can also make a will in your favour.
- C. W.—Seek the advice of any respectable medical man in your town; avoid quacks as you would a pestilence, for in your case they would lead you to grief.
- AGNES W.—To clean steel or iron take one ounce of soft soap, two ounces of emery, and make into a paste; rub it on the article to be cleaned, and then polish with leather or flannel.
- C. W.—Cleanliness, a good diet, and exercise in the open air, will probably effect the cure; this failing, consult a medical man, who, if it arise from constitutional derangement, may advise iron or quinine.
- R. F.—To make puff puddings take three eggs, a little flour, a pint of milk, and a small portion of salt; pour the milk when boiling on the flour, then add the eggs; it will take about half-an-hour to bake.
- C. C. R.—He should attend the reception at the house. In a case of exigency, the wedding present might be sent on the day of the wedding, but it would be better to send it earlier.
- V. W.—Dr. Wolcott, who, under the assumed name of Peter Findar, published satires, was born at Doddbrook, in Devon, 1738, and practised as a physician at Truro.
- W. B.—The name Nasturtium is commonly given to a showy and useful garden plant, the Indian cress (or tropaeolum majus); it has remarkable antiscorbutic properties, and is interesting in a chemical point of view from its containing iodine.
- T. H.—If you wish to clean tea-trays have a sponge diluted with warm water and a little soap, then rub them with a dry cloth, adding a small quantity of flour.
- W. H. R.—The word "gipsy" is probably a corruption of Egyptian. They migrated from the East in the 15th century; are called wanderers by the Germans, heathens by the Dutch, Tartars by the Danes and Swedes.
- M. R.—Tripe may be dressed in various ways; it may be cut in pieces and fried in butter, stewed in gravy with mushrooms, or cut into collops, sprinkled with minced onions and herbs, and then fried a nice brown in clarified butter.
- C. C. R.—To make a Spanish salad use one teaspoonful of water, a very little pepper and salt, two wine-glasses of oil, and about a dessert spoonful of very strong vinegar; but to make it thoroughly good some sweet herbs should be added, chopped very fine.
- B. A.—Mulatto, from *mulo*, a mule, is commonly applied to the offspring of parents, one of whom is black, the other white. The mulatto is of a yellowish colour, with frizzled, or woolly hair, and more resembles the white than the black.
- T. N. J.—To prevent hair falling off the following is a good pomade:—Beef suet, one ounce; oil of origanum and bergamot, each ten drops; tincture of cantharides, one teaspoonful. Melt the suet, and when nearly cold stir in the other ingredients: use when set.

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C. C. H.—The following are excellent recipes for making imitation "ground" glass window panes:—
1. White flaking paint stippled in and softened off with fine flannel. 2. Epsom salts dissolved in warm water, and washed on the glass with a soft brush. In both cases the window is to be well cleaned.

HIS SWEETHEART'S NAME.

Oh! would you know the sweetest maid
That e'en drank from the fountain,
The fairest one, the rarest one
In valley or on mountain?
If I should tell the secret now
You then would know it well, sir;
But as she's mine, by vows divine,
I think I will not tell, sir.
Her eyes are blue,
Of tender hue,
And clear as yonder well, sir;
Though me you blame,
Her pretty name
I'll never, never tell, sir.

She is a farmer's daughter dear,
And trips among the daisies;
She's like a dove, my little love,
And I will sing her praises:
Though down the rosy lane
To greet me she advances,
With smiles so rare, she doth not care
To meet a stranger's glances.
Her eyes are blue,
Of tender hue,
And clear as yonder well, sir;
Though me you blame,
Her pretty name
I'll never, never tell, sir.

My little wildflower bloometh sweet,
Afar from town or city;
Her maiden heart is full of love;
Her soul is full of pity:
The grand old farm glows with the charm
She gives, from field to dell, sir;
But as she's mine, by vows divine,
Her name I will not tell, sir.
Her eyes are blue,
Of tender hue;
Her voice is quite divine, sir;
And when the leaves
Fall with the sheaves,
She'll change her name for mine, sir.

M. A. K.

DATA.—1. Apply personally to a director, if you are acquainted with one, if not by letter enclosing recommendation letters to the board of directors. But without previous training how foolish to expect that you could obtain such an onerous situation. 2. The Scotch lines are least occupied on Sundays.

M. P.—1. The art of knitting stockings with needles was introduced into England from Spain in 1561. Queen Elizabeth, in the same year, was the first to use silk stockings; before that time prices were cloth hose. 2. Starbuck was first taught by Mrs. Dischelm, a Flemish lady, in the year 594.

W. W. T.—It is evident that your friend is very much in love with you, and everything you do or say which shows him that you do not care for him as he wishes that you should, irritates a mind probably naturally petulant and exacting. In justice to your friend, and for the sake of your own comfort, you should either dismiss him or accept him as a lover. In the latter case you should let him make a formal engagement before you allow him the privilege every lover expects. You are wise to make a confidant of your mother.

T. S. B.—If living separate from your husband, under the circumstances you mention, you can without doubt claim at his hands an income for your maintenance, in reasonable proportion to his position and wealth. But if, as you say, he be travelling on the Continent, in such society, why not sue for a divorce?

R. S. B.—Small warts can be burned out with caustic or by the actual cautery; the larger are removed more effectively and easily by the surgeon's knife. A man's friends usually give him plenty of receipts to remove warts; onions and the juice of milkweed appear to be the favourite; after giving them a fair trial you will probably return to caustics or the knife.

C. M. R.—To make a seed-cake inexpensively have the dough sent from the baker's, put it in a basin, cover with a cloth, and set it in a warm place to rise, then, with a wooden spoon, beat the dripping to a liquid, and, with the other ingredients, sugar and caraway seeds, add it to the dough, put it into a buttered tin, and bake for about two hours.

R. T. P.—Take heart. You know that "the course of true love never did run smooth." "Time softens all things." Thus, if you are deserving and patient, it is probable that a few years, perhaps months, may mollify the stony hearts of the mistress and aunt of your inamorato, who never will permit you either to see or to write to her; at all events, although you feel now that it is impossible to live without seeing or hearing from her till her time is up to leave her situation, think well before, following the custom of the ancient Romans, you throw yourself upon your sword.

R. W. P.—The lines you mention—namely:

"He that fights and runs away
May live to fight another day"

are generally attributed to "Hudibras," but they are really much older. They may be found in a book published in 1656. The real couplet of "Hudibras" is—

"For those that fly may fight again,
Which he can never do that's slain."

In reply to your other question respecting the line—

"There is a good time coming,"

it is an expression used by Sir Walter Scott.

B. H.—1. No. 2. You may, of course, have friends of the other sex, but no self-respecting girl should receive protestations of love from anyone who does not accompany his professions of love with a proposal of marriage. 3. Yes. 4. There is no impropriety in corresponding, if you can do so openly, with your friends' approval, but the practice is one which has often led to trouble. 4. A letter to a friend should begin, "My dear friend," or, "My dear Mr. Smith," or, "My dear Jack," according as you are accustomed to call your friend "Mr. Smith" or "Jack," in ordinary conversation. 5. You should let the gentleman ask you for your photograph before asking him for his.

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